

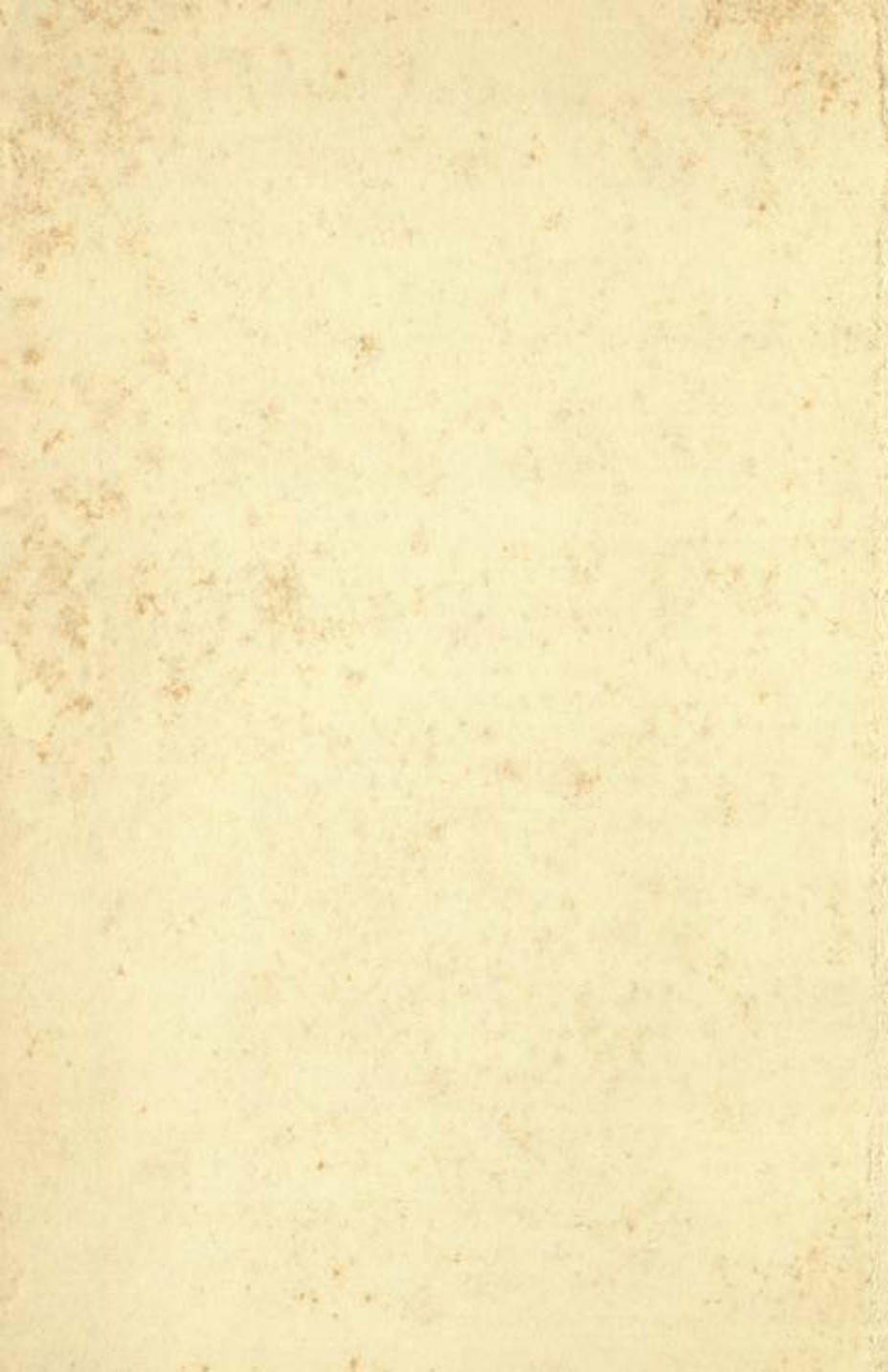
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# Judy and Lakshmi

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*For my grandchildren and their  
friends and neighbours in Madras,  
and most of all for "PAPU"*

(ALAMELU SANJIVI)

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## *Judy in Madras*

ALL NIGHT the noise of the crickets was like tiny bells. If Judy woke in the night, turning over to get a cool piece of sheet to lie on, she could see through the pale cage of her mosquito net to the big window and the still, dark sprays of bougainvillæa which would be purple and claret-coloured by day. There was the noise of the crickets and sometimes a dog barking, and the reassuring tap of sticks from the Gurkha watchman who used to go round the houses and frighten away thieves and perhaps snakes. Just before it was going to be light the crows began, shouting caws as they woke and changed trees. Then came the mynahs jabbering at one another. Sometimes there would be other birds, nicer ones. Then it began to get light very quickly.

After that there was an hour when Judy couldn't help saying to herself that it was a lovely morning, because in England it would have been a lovely morning. But this wasn't England. This was Madras and it was going to be a hot Indian day and Judy was going to sweat her way through school, feeling dreadfully sticky and sleepy by afternoon. She mostly did



her homework in the early morning, because she was so hot and tired in the evening after school, but Ben used to interrupt and his Ayah simply couldn't stop him. Or rather she wouldn't. Ben was only three but he seemed to be able to make Mary, his Ayah, do anything he wanted, and often he wanted to do something rather naughty.

Sometimes in the early morning Judy would write to her big brother, John, who was back in England at school. He used to write back about playing football in a beastly cold wind and having to put on an extra sweater and things like that. It just didn't seem possible. Judy's father was a doctor; her mother did welfare work, which always sounded very gloomy. Her father went off early to his hospital and her mother used to leave Judy at school on her way to the centre where she mostly worked. Judy heard a lot of talk about illnesses and sometimes she used to get quite worried. Other times she worried more about school.

But after school they often went swimming at the club. Judy could dive quite well and Ben used to flop in, laughing, and swim like a fish. Judy hadn't been able to swim when she was three, but in those days she had been in England, with only a nasty indoor swimming-bath or rough grey sea in the summer holidays, instead of the lovely pool with the great trees behind it and the jets of water against the blue sky, and pressed lime with chips, or with luck even an ice when one sat about in one's bathing things afterwards, feeling more or less cool.

Sometimes they went to Elliot's Beach where they had a hut made out of palm leaves, but in summer the sand got almost too hot to walk on. You couldn't have ices here, but you might have a young coconut full of delicious juice that tasted somehow pale green, and flesh of tender jelly. These coconuts were smooth golden green outside, as unlike the rough brown coconuts that one gets off English coconut shies, as Indian people and English people are unlike one another—on the outside, that is.

Sometimes Judy thought they really were very unlike. Most of her class at school were Indian girls and she didn't always find them easy to talk to. Some of them seemed only to be interested in film stars. Or else they were interested in things that Judy didn't share in. Sometimes it would be a family wedding, but Judy thought a lot of it was silly; why should people make all this fuss about horoscopes? Why didn't they just decide to get married and then go ahead without anyone else interfering, as Judy's Aunt Margaret had done? When they had a wedding in the house next door, there were two bands playing all night and for two days—and just when the term exams were happening too!

Some things at the school were extra difficult for Judy; for instance, they had to learn Hindi. At the beginning the teacher had given them a lecture about it, telling them that India was one country and must have one language. That couldn't be English because English, after all, was a foreign language. You had to



agree that far. Hindi was the language of the capital and it had come down from Sanskrit, which was the old language that the ancient books, which were so important for Hindu civilisation, were written in. If you wanted to understand Indian history and thinking then you had to learn Hindi. But nobody in the streets of Madras spoke Hindi; they all spoke Tamil and so did most of the girls at the school when they were talking to one another and playing. Judy spoke a little Tamil but not very well; she would much rather have learnt more Tamil than all that Hindi. But still, she did more or less see why it had to be taught.

She talked a bit of Tamil to the servants. There was a cook-bearer called George who had a black moustache. He thought he could talk good English, but sometimes it was very difficult to understand, and if he didn't want to understand what you were saying to him, then it was no good going on talking. There was a washing-Ayah called Vasiki who was pretty and wore little ear-rings and studs in her nose to make her look prettier. And then there was a mali, the gardener who swept up the leaves and watered and grew things in pots; he grew beautiful big zinnias and bright-coloured balsams and marigolds. And he grew tall canna lilies, deep red and orange, and he grew cauliflower flowers and ladies' fingers and great trailing pumpkins. On the fence between their garden and the house at the back he grew morning glories, deep blue and purple. Between them and the house where the wedding had

been there was a plaster wall, and between them and the house at the other side there was a thick hedge of lantana with pinky-yellow flowers and a lovely sharp smell. There were oleander bushes in the garden too, and a mango tree and alamanders with yellow trumpets, and a frangipane bush with very sweet white flowers. But what the mali liked best was a very ordinary little chrysanthemum which was difficult to grow in Madras. Gardeners are always like that.

Judy used sometimes to help the mali, especially with watering things. He had to water everything every day except during the rains. But even so the grass got to look very brown and nasty in the hot weather and not a bit like an English lawn. One very nice thing about the garden was that so many birds came into it. There were always mynahs, glossy birds which made a flurry of black and white when they flew, blue-grey bulbuls, and often the tiny, shining purple flower-suckers whose wings moved so fast you could hardly see them. And all the time, whenever they thought they could pick anything up, flapping on to the veranda and even the window-sills, the boring old crows.

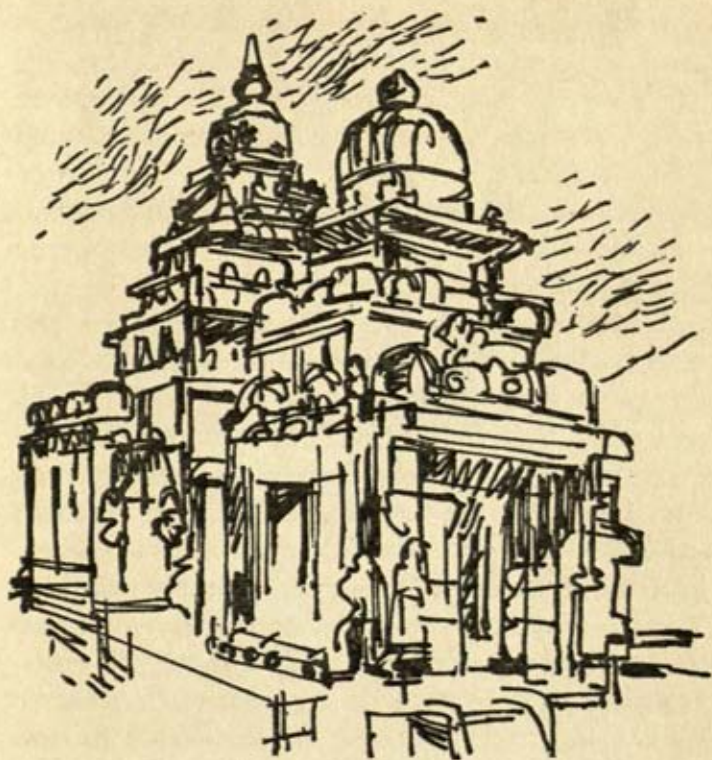
Outside in the road the bullock carts went creaking by and the goats tried to nip in through the hedge to eat the flowers. But there were cars and lorries as well and sometimes a rickshaw. Judy never liked going in a rickshaw with the poor man trotting in front on his thin legs. But some of the girls at school went home by rickshaw. If only, thought Judy, Madras buses



were nice, comfortable, cool buses like the ones in London ! But they weren't.

It wasn't so bad in winter, but then winter only lasted a few weeks. Then it was like the hottest kind of hot weather in England, and some people even thought it was too cold for bathing. One didn't burn oneself touching the outside of a car. In winter they went for expeditions at the week-end. They went to Mahabalipuram where the great stone bulls and elephants stand calmly in the sun as they have stood for century after century ; where the blue sea breaks into white caps round the point of land where the old temple stands ; where the great rock is frescoed with saints and forest spirits watching them, with monkeys, with a meditating cat and with gentle elephants ; where on yet another rock face Krishna holds up the mountain which is protecting from the terrible thunderstorm the frightened cow-herds and the unfrightened cows.

They went to the bird sanctuary where the trees were covered with nesting herons and they went to visit temples here and there. But when the weather got hotter it was too tiring to drive. One Saturday they went out with the mass-radiography unit to one of the villages and Judy ticked off lists for the doctors. This was all being done to try and find out how many people had tuberculosis ; then they could be sent to hospital and there was a chance that they would get well again. There were so many people who looked so thin ; Judy's mother said that they had very little to eat except rice with different flavours and if only they could get



more milk it wouldn't be so bad. "One day," said Judy's mother, "we'll go out to one of the National Extension Service schemes and see how things are there."

"What's that?" said Judy.

Her mother explained that it was most important for India to help the villages where millions and millions of people live and where the food has to be



grown. The Government of India was trying to do two things : to improve agriculture, which meant growing better crops, or even different kinds, rearing better cattle and so on ; and also to help people to lead more useful lives, and to make a little money by small industry. " You know how we try to buy rugs and curtains and cotton stuff that's been made in the villages ? " she said.

" Yes," said Judy, who sometimes wished they didn't, because there were much smarter cottons in the shops from England and Switzerland, and she would like to have had her frocks made out of them.

" I think all of us who live in India ought to help with the things the Indian Government is trying to do. They started off the Five-Year Plan to make things a little bit better for poor people, and in the next Five-Year Plan they will be a bit better still, and the money that gets made in India will go less to the rich people and more to the poor ones. At least that's what the real leaders, the men like Nehru, want. Only there are always some people who are selfish."

Judy thought she knew what her mother was thinking about. Her mother was always having rows with one or two of the top people who didn't really bother about what was happening so long as they had an easy time. Probably she was quite right, Judy thought, but all the same she wished she wouldn't have the rows. Once it was the father of a girl at school, not a very nice girl but still . . . and it made Mother so cross and hot. And did it matter all that much ?

In the school holidays they went up into the hills, but Judy's father and mother couldn't stay all the time, so she and Ben and Ayah were left in lodgings with some friends who had a boy who was only interested in collecting stamps. So it was rather dull though it was nice and cool—cool enough to wear a jersey in the evenings and have blankets at night, cool enough to want to rush about and play games, which one hardly ever seemed to want to do in Madras.

However, Judy did do something nice for her eleventh birthday, which was otherwise rather dull, though she got some books she had wanted. She and the stamp collecting boy went out to a game reserve and rode for hours on an elephant that was as nice as a Mahabalipuram elephant and cleverly broke off the branches which were getting in the way and might have swept them off. They saw a few wild elephants a long way off in a clearing. They were feeding on tufts of grass that almost hid their legs, pulling them up and waving their trunks about. They looked very gentle, like big shadows, but when they decided to move away one of them broke off a tree with a crash in a cheerful way. In that part of the world people had to dig deep ditches to keep the elephants off their crops. Judy kept on thinking of elephants in zoos and how they must miss all this free wandering and grazing and play. After that they saw a bison and then among the low bushes and bamboos a big black thing that turned out to be a bear. Even the stamp collecting boy got



interested then. Judy longed to see more animals. Of course there were always the monkeys and the little palm squirrels, but India must be full of exciting creatures and it seemed such a shame that one never saw them. She used to think about the elephants every night before going to sleep.

*The Gap in the Fence*

THE NEIGHBOURS through the lantana hedge were all right for Ben but a little dull for Judy. They had a rather untidy garden, mostly taken up with their cow, and two little girls of seven and eight and a baby boy. The boy was called Rama-Krishna, which seemed a very big and important name for such a little baby, but everyone in the family appeared to think he was wonderful. His sisters carried him about a lot though he looked much too heavy for them. Judy liked the younger of the two girls, Varanti, who enjoyed ball games and tops and skipping. Judy taught her things in English which she picked up very quickly and she told Judy rhymes for games in Tamil, only she always burst out laughing half-way through. Their father was something or other in a government office and he always seemed rather worried.

The neighbours who had had the wedding in their house were rather stuck up. They had a big car, and the son, who was a student, had a motor bike and always rode too fast. Their only daughter was the one who had got married.

But the other neighbours?

Judy had often wondered about the house at the back beyond the fence of the morning glories. From the flat roof of her own house you could see into their garden and it looked a very nice one. The lady at that house did quite a lot of gardening herself ; there were always banks of pots round the veranda. She used to come out in the early morning to pick flowers, the saris she was wearing the colour of the flowers—orange and plum and every kind of red and pink—the green of young banana leaves—blue-green of the sea off the Marina beach, or deep blue of the night sky. And often a glitter of gold on their borders. Sometimes Judy saw children in the garden, but she was never quite sure whether they were the lady's own children. There always seem to be so many friends and relations in an Indian house, she said to herself, and sometimes it's very muddling. There was one school friend whose house she sometimes visited for tea, and Judy never knew whether the other children there were her brothers and sisters or her cousins, or perhaps one of them was the Ayah's little girl ; she never managed to get it cleared up !

Some of her school friends lived in big rambling houses, with quite big gardens full of trees, even in the middle of Madras. You went through a dark, gloomy-looking, messy kind of hall and out again on to a broad tiled veranda, and there it was more like a big farmyard with all sorts of people doing every kind of thing, cooking and washing and mending chairs and rocking babies and making up little bunches of flowers. There



would be hens and goats and a buffalo or two lying about, and of course cows, and all the grown-ups seemed to be uncles and aunts, or perhaps great-uncles and aunts, and often there was a quite old lady whom everyone seemed rather scared of. But these, though fun to go to, were rather old-fashioned houses. More of her friends lived in small separate houses or even in flats. But the flats got awfully hot in the warm weather.

When she came back to school after the hot weather holidays in the hills there were no other English girls in her class at school. There were some younger ones, but now Judy was eleven and the others of her own age had mostly gone to schools in the hills, or their parents had left India and gone back home. It would be another year before Judy's father and mother went back and she saw her big brother, John, again. In a way it was funny being in India. It was the Indians' country and the British were really foreigners, as foreign as French people, or Germans, or Africans. Only the Indians seemed to like the British better and there were English notices up on the street corners and shop fronts, and her father read *The Hindu*, which was a newspaper all in English. Judy thought it was rather a dull paper except sometimes on Sundays when there were pictures, but then the papers grown-ups liked usually were rather dull.

There were a lot of things that were difficult to understand; for instance, about Brahmins. It sounded as though in the old days they had been the ones who had ordered everyone about and were so holy that



they couldn't do ordinary work and wouldn't even touch the people who had to, the low caste people. So now the ones who used to be at the bottom and were called the Harijans didn't like the Brahmins and tried to get their own back. And there were awful rows and sometimes people got killed.

When Judy asked her father about the family on the other side of the morning glories fence, he said they were Brahmins. The husband was a Sanskrit scholar and he wasn't sure that they'd want to know people who weren't Hindu.

"If they're at all old-fashioned, Judy," he said, "they wouldn't want you or me inside their house. To them we would be like the Harijans. They'd feel we'd dirtied their house."

"It seems awfully silly," said Judy.

"Well," said her father, "in some ways we are rather dirty. We wear out-of-doors shoes in the house. Look at all the dust you've got on your sandals, Judy! And we take baths lying in water we've washed in, and we eat meat which is really dead animals."

"I wouldn't mind never eating meat, if I could only have vegetable curry—and brinjals—and tomatoes—and curds—and nuts, lots of nuts—and poppadums—and sometimes chicken."

"Chicken is meat," said her father, "and so are eggs. A real Brahmin wouldn't eat eggs."

So perhaps, thought Judy, I wouldn't be allowed into that house. And the more she thought that the more she wondered what the house behind the fence

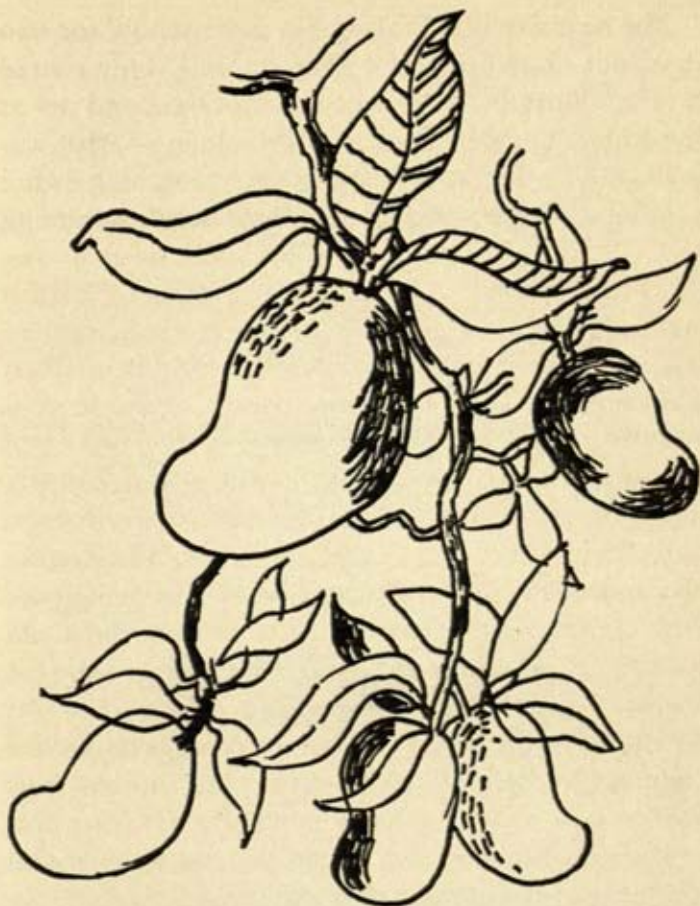
was like inside. Most of her friends' houses were rather plain inside, usually colour-washed blue or pink, and there'd be photographs and a calendar and one or two coloured prints—the nicest ones were of Lord Krishna as a little boy, sometimes with his mother and sometimes with the milkmaids, but he always looked as if he was having fun, like a real little boy, never soppy at all. The pictures of the other Gods and Goddesses were sometimes rather frightening. Would this big house have even bigger pictures? Would they have a radio? Above all, did the lady speak English?

In the hot weather the mali spent most of his time watering. But Judy didn't want to help even with that after she got back from school. She only wanted to have a shower and then sit under the fan and drink glass after glass of pressed lime. The mali had a clump of deep-red hollyhocks that he was very proud of. It was funny, Judy thought, that hollyhocks grew just as well in London as in Madras: clever old hollyhocks! And then a goat came in, and began trying to eat these hollyhocks. Mali and bearer rushed at the goat, shouted at it and shooed it out. But in its fright it bumped into and half-knocked over a bit of the fence the morning glories climbed up. "I wonder how long it will be before they get round to mending that," said Judy's mother a little gloomily. In the hot weather nobody wanted to do anything extra. The really hot weather was just as uncomfortable for the Indians as for the English, and they had fewer fans and refrigerators and things like that.



The next day was Friday. No more school for two days, but oh, what a lot of homework ! Judy started on the history but it all went in at one ear and out at the other. Then she heard Ayah screaming—what was it all about ? It couldn't be a snake or anything awful, could it ? Vasiki, the washing-Ayah, began screaming too. Judy jumped up and asked them what it was. They had lost Ben ! He had been playing in the garden and suddenly he wasn't there. Judy ran out into the hot road but there was nothing there, no Ben. Then suddenly she remembered the corner of the fence—yes, the flowers had been trodden on ! She got on to a chair and looked over the top. There, sure enough, in the beautiful other garden was Ben, with his hand in the hand of the lady of the house, who was wearing one of her lovely saris, creamy white like frangipane flowers with a complicated gold pattern woven along the border. She stooped down to Ben's height and the diamonds in her ear-rings flashed in the sun. She was pointing up to one of her mango trees and Ben nodded vigorously. He was only wearing his shortest blue cotton pants and of course no shoes. Ben couldn't bear wearing shoes ; his feet had got so hard by now that the hot dust didn't seem to burn him.

The lady reached up and picked a mango—such a beauty, all bronzy-gold. She untied the corner of her sari and took out a little silver knife. She cut the mango and Ben got his face well into it ; streams of pale gold juice ran all down his tummy. Ayah was getting quite worried, so Judy thought she would have to go in after



him. There was just enough gap for her to slip through. She was wearing a cotton pinafore dress which left her arms and most of her back bare and her hair looked bleached against her brown skin.

She came forward rather cautiously from under the



banana palm that grew at the far side of the fence ; in the corner that you couldn't see from their own side there was a lovely foliage plant with long leaves of mottled red and purple. When the lady saw her she made a polite namaskar greeting, with the palms of her hands together in front of her chest. The lady did the same thing back to her ; she was wearing rings and one of them had a lovely flat diamond in it. Then the lady said in a clear, rather small voice, "I was hoping very much you would come and see me."

"Oh," said Judy, "I didn't know. I thought . . ." And then she didn't quite know what she had thought.

The lady said, "I have seen you on your roof. It is cooler here, yes ?"

Judy stretched out her bare toes in the grass which was still damp from its watering, "It's lovely," she said.

There were all sorts of bits one couldn't see from the house, partly because there was a screen of dwarf coconut palms, the trunks not more than a few feet high, with golden-brown coconuts on them ripening, not at any special season, but all through the year. There was, for instance, a little thatched house with melons growing over it. In front there was a cow being milked by a man in a clean dhoti who squatted in front of it, balanced on the balls of his feet, with a shining metal pot between his knees into which he was carefully squirting the milk. The calf waited beside the cow ; it could have its drink at the end. The cow and calf were both a lovely silvery grey and looked much

less thin than most of the cows that wandered about the streets of Madras. Now, in the middle of summer, they could find no green stuff and lived mostly on rice straw, but this lady's cows had real hay, as well as vegetable leaves from the garden. The man stopped milking so as to leave a good bit for the calf. The lady went up and touched the cow and the cow stopped licking the calf and looked round with large mild eyes at the lady.

Ben had finished his mango but his face was sticky ; in fact he was rather sticky all over. There was a tap in the corner. " May I ? " said Judy rather uncertainly.

The lady laughed. " Yes, indeed ! Your brother came to visit me on an auspicious day. You know that Friday is an auspicious day ? " Judy nodded. All her school friends thought the same. She got Ben a little unsticky and dried him on a corner of her skirt.

" And now we shall have some coffee," the lady said.

Judy hesitated and looked down at her dress ; she wished she was in something tidier. But the lady didn't seem to notice. She took them over to the veranda, stepping over the kolams, the maze-like patterns of white rice flour that most South Indian Hindu ladies draw outside their doors. Judy noticed that she kicked off her sandals ; it is so much easier to do that when one wears an Indian sandal without a heel strap, but with a strap to the big toe. Hers had very pretty embroidered straps.

The veranda had lots of comfortable cane chairs and little tables. The lady called into the cool dark of the



inner room and in a minute a servant came out with coffee on a tray. So she doesn't mind us drinking out of her cups, Judy thought with relief, and smelt the delicious mixed smell of coffee and the white and yellow flowers that the lady wore in her hair. The floor of the veranda was swept and polished, not a leaf out of place on the pot plants. The lady saw her looking round. "Friday is such a lovely day," she said. "Everything is clean, so clean! I wake early on Friday and I am so happy to think of all this cleanness."

"What do you do?" said Judy softly.

"Oh," said the lady, "I have my oil bath and that is very, very good. I feel new after that, my fingers, my hair. And then, well, I make all shining in my puja room. One day I will take you there and show you my Gods, all so shining. I put flowers on them."

"Oh, I've seen you picking flowers," said Judy. "I wondered—you always seemed to choose them so specially."

"Yes," said the lady, "I do choose them specially. Each flower has a meaning. Will you have another cup of coffee, my children? Your name is——?"

"Judy. And he's Ben. That's short for Benjamin."

"Benjamin," said the lady, smiling, as though it was rather a funny name. "Yes, I have heard it. There is a great Indian doctor called Benjamin." She poured out the coffee, putting in lots of sugar. The servant brought some cakes, very crisp and with a taste Judy didn't recognise. Ben had settled in to enjoy himself.

"But everything, everything must be clean on

Friday ! ” the lady went on. “ Polished and shining like flowers themselves. ”

And then suddenly a girl just a bit older than Judy came running out of the house and stopped short opposite Judy. She was wearing a pink-spotted sari and the flowers in her hair were fresh. “ Hallo ! ” she said.

“ Why, it’s you ! ” said Judy.

The lady looked at them both. “ Do you and Lakshmi know one another ? ” she asked.

“ Oh, yes ! ” said Judy. “ She’s a wizard diver—she goes off the high board. But I didn’t know she lived here. ”

The lady laughed and Lakshmi began explaining to Judy. “ I come sometimes to stay with Ammani Patti—that means our grandmother Ammani. . . . ” She held the lady’s hand in hers for a moment. “ And she said there was someone at the other side of the wall, but I never knew it was you ! ”

“ It was Ben who got through the fence, ” Judy began, and then of course Ben suddenly began to think he was in a strange place and started asking for Ayah, and Judy knew he was going to howl in a minute if she didn’t take him back. She got up to say good-bye and go. As she did so a man came out on to the veranda. Judy thought he must be the lady’s husband, Lakshmi’s grandfather. He was carrying two rather old-looking books whose covers had come off ; his hair was cut short in front, long behind. He smiled at Lakshmi and looked amiably at Judy, as though she was something



that had come out of one of the books. Judy made a namaskar but Ben was tugging at her frock and she thought she had better go at once.

Lakshmi came with them to the fence. Actually, Judy was rather scared of Lakshmi; she was such a good diver and always seemed to be in the middle of a whole lot of other girls who were all a bit older than Judy and all knew one another, and were all awfully good at games. None of them went to Judy's school. But now Lakshmi said, "Don't mend the fence, Judy!"



*Under the Banyan*

IT TURNED out that Lakshmi was only staying for a few days with her grandmother, but it did make a start. Judy suddenly found herself less worried about school and everything, more ready to do things, not missing John quite so much, more pleased to be still in India than she had been for a long time! Lakshmi turned up her nose at film stars; she was interested in doing things, not looking on. She could do life-saving and swim splendidly under water; she shot through the surf at Elliot's Beach; and she knew all sorts of exciting things about Indian history that didn't seem to be in the school books. And—oh, she was so pretty! Judy didn't usually go soppy over people, but Lakshmi was different; to see her slipping on her bangles, or taking a dance step, it was like watching a wild fawn. Sometimes she put flowers into Judy's hair, fat, pink, very sweet roses mostly. Judy wore them till they dropped off.

Judy's mother was a little surprised at the household over the fence being so friendly, but agreed that the gap might stay so long as Ben and Judy didn't make nuisances of themselves. "After all, Judy," she said,

"we are the wrong colour here! Most Indians are very nice to us, very friendly—perhaps more than we deserve after some of the things that happened. . . ."

"We brought plenty of good things," her father said, "science and medicine. Accuracy. Punctuality. A modern way of looking at things. . . ."

Judy knew this one by heart and how her parents would go over it all again, the fors and againsts of the British in India. Sometimes it came up at school and once or twice she got very angry and felt she couldn't bear the way the Indian girls had forgotten all the good things that had come out of the West, most of all from England or Scotland, or pretended they had all been invented in India—and saying that their own stupid films that went on for hours and hours, and in which nothing happened but a lot of soppy songs and dances, were better than American ones! If only people would stop thinking about it—after all, she said to herself, it's history, it's all over, talking about it won't make it any different. Of course Europeans aren't the same as Indians and of course Indians aren't the same as us, and it's no use either of us pretending anything else, and it's all nonsense thinking one lot are better than the others, so why have we always got to go on worrying about it? Then she heard her father say that Lakshmi's father, Kumar, was an engineer. "They must have let him go to Europe, though that isn't easy for a Brahmin," her father said. "He may eat the wrong things by accident and he's sure to find it dirty."



"What sort of an engineer is he?" Judy asked.

"I know he was assistant on one of the big dam projects," her father said. "I've heard him well spoken of. A keen man, an upright man."

What a funny word, thought Judy, suddenly imagining an un-upright man crawling around. But she knew that what her father meant was that Lakshmi's father didn't take bribes, that he worked hard and wasn't always going off on leaves that he hadn't earned, and above all, that he was accurate. Accurate. That was one of her father's favourite words. Even her brother, John, had picked it up. His last letter was all about cricket and how one had to hit the ball accurately; he'd put in some drawings showing how a cricket ball went if you held the bat this way or that way. It was all rather like boring old geometry—and, besides, it sounded frightfully hot!

Sometimes in the evenings there would be a cricket match going on in Madras, the poor men running like mad and almost melting in the heat; you could hardly bear to look at them. In summer one just wanted to get into a patch of shade and stay there—with a mango if possible. One of Judy's favourite places was a big banyan tree at Adyar, an old old tree that had been allowed and encouraged to let its spreading branches drop rootlets down on to the ground, where they took root and in a few years became small tree trunks. The banyans in the street tried to do this, but as soon as the tender rooting ends came down to the level where they could be eaten by cows or goats—well, they were



eaten. But the big banyan at Adyar had spread and spread year after year until it had become a grove of banyans all joined together by pillars and flat arches. Creepers grew up some of the banyan stems and there were always hundreds of birds and darling little squirrels that ran among the leaves as easily upside down as right side up. If her mother dropped Judy there with her homework she never managed to get it done.

The difficulty was that so many other people liked sitting under the banyan tree too! If only, she thought, there weren't quite so many people everywhere in India, everywhere. One just got tired of faces and hands and thin legs—oh, and beggars! If you went into any of the shops in Mount Road there would be dozens of beggars waiting, whining, "No father, no mother." And you never knew—it might be true and how awful that would be! Her mother said one oughtn't to give them anything: "it only encourages them."

But sometimes all the same she did, especially if it was a woman with a baby or if she was out with Ben. "It's too dreadful," she would say to Judy, "when I'm getting things for Ben and they just haven't anything to eat." Judy could never quite believe that; they'd all got something to eat at home surely? But one day she was allowed to go with Vasiki, the washing-Ayah, to visit her house in one of the villages of mud and palm lattice houses that happen wherever there is a blank space in Madras. Vasiki had a beautiful clean

house, the floor and walls without a stain on them, but hardly any furniture. Her mother and her two children were there, but the children were much too shy to talk to Judy. They were in their best clothes, the little girl's skirt made out of a dress that Judy had outgrown. In the village people were cooking and cleaning and washing themselves and their clothes, but there were beggars there too, getting a handful of rice or dal here and there and gobbling it up. So they really hadn't got houses of their own!

But all the same, Judy didn't like the beggars and one of the nice things about the banyan tree was that there weren't any beggars there. One day she was sitting there with a book but really trying to see some very bright-coloured bird that was scuffling about high up among the tip-top leaves. If only she could see it properly! Then Lakshmi came running up wearing her dancing clothes: green cotton pyjamas, tight at the ankles and a short pink sari over the top. She caught hold of Judy. "Come and see the dancing!" she said, and pulled her over into the Kalakshetra Gardens, where Lakshmi explained she was having a dancing class. It was all very muddling; Judy always seemed to be finding something else that Lakshmi was doing as well as regular school. In fact, sometimes it looked as if school didn't count for much for Lakshmi, though she knew such lots of things.

She settled Judy down to watch in a corner of the pretty palm lattice practice hall, so clean and shining with flowers and a lighted lamp. There were ten or



twelve girls—Judy knew two of them—all dressed like Lakshmi in cotton dancing pyjamas with just a twist of sari over them, and of course flowers in their hair, a sweet-smelling bunch at the back of the neck just where the long black plait began. In this dance each of them held a ribbon hanging from the roof and wove them together as they danced to the music of drums and the three-stringed vina and a funny little harmonium like a book, that opened and shut to make the air come through. “A village dance!” said Lakshmi. It reminded Judy of old pictures and story books about maypoles on village greens in England. But there weren’t any English maypoles now.

“Now,” said Lakshmi, knotting her sari tighter, “I’m going to practise my Bharatnatyam. That means the dance of India, Judy, and it used to be danced only in the temples by the girls who were dedicated to the Gods. Now it is our own. But it is still a kind of prayer, Judy. It is—oh, I’m not sure, perhaps joy, praise. You will see.”

They went into a small room with the floor kept shinely smooth since no dirty shoe ever came on it. There was no music, but her teacher sang or hummed and knocked out the rhythm with a skilled hand and a piece of wood. The first dance was a warming up, a suppling of joints and muscles, and it seemed to Judy that Lakshmi was changing under her eyes, becoming not herself but something danced. In the second dance, which was a practice of posture and gestures, this seemed to happen even more. Lakshmi’s eyeballs





and neck slid from side to side, her arms rippled like snakes, her knees and hips flexed, her fingers were cups, were flowers, were living beings. The puzzling rhythms each meant something, a softness or a sudden disconcerting fierceness as though for a moment there had been a tiger in the dance.

Judy, sitting on the floor, began to wonder if she knew Lakshmi at all when Lakshmi could turn into this. But the rhythm ended, and Lakshmi pushed back her hair ; she was sweating—and herself again. “One day,” she said, “I hope I shall really—dance.”

“It must be wonderful,” Judy said, even a little scared.

“We will teach you !” said Lakshmi. So after the practices were over she and her friends began to try and teach Judy. But she couldn’t manage at all. She couldn’t hear properly what the rhythms were telling her to do. Her feet and hands were clumsy and heavy compared with theirs. Still, she came and watched the dancing several times. Kathak was fun, the tremendously vigorous northern dancing with bells on the ankles and delicate, exact foot-work in an ever changing rhythm beaten out on the tablas, the little drums which had so many tones according to how and where they were tapped or slapped. The younger children started with that, learning the arm and hand movements, at first almost like complicated P.T. exercises, and stamping like little horses while the ankle bells rang. It ought to be easy to learn, Judy thought, but somehow it wasn’t !



Once she came and watched some of the boys. They were dancing Kathakali, the South Indian dancing which is half like acting and in which the dancers are heavily painted in red and green and black and disguised with elaborate robes. These boys wore only



their practice clothes, loose white folded trousers ; they were barefoot like the girls and all the time a singer chanted the story they were dancing. But even if you couldn't understand the song you couldn't help understanding the dance. In it Hanuman, the king of the monkeys, himself a God, meets and fights with the young heroes of the forest whom he recognises and allows to capture him. With astonishing slow leaps and pauses, flicker of finger and eye gestures, the boys acted it out, bending bows, throwing spears, taunting one another. So clearly they did it that you could almost see real bows and spears, almost see the ground opening underfoot, almost know the young Hanuman dancer, with the sweat breaking out and streaming down his chest as he sprang and balanced and quivered, was a God in disguise. Wonderful, wonderful, thought Judy, to be able to turn oneself into someone utterly else !

Sometimes at a week-end they would drive out to the Fort. Here was the big cool-looking building where the Madras parliament met, but on Sundays there was nobody about, hardly a car, only the old square at the back quiet and amiable with solid blocks of shade from the tall buildings, with pillars and verandas and even rows of windows, white painted and dignified. They were mostly barracks now and the Madras army kept them very tidy and smart, polishing all the brass, blacking the old stone cannon balls and piling them into whitewashed circles, even trimming the leaves of the palms in case they looked untidy ! There was a

nice cool museum at Fort St. George with an old iron cannon outside decorated with cheerful patterns and pointing out to sea. In winter Judy liked walking up on to the walls of the old Fort, but not now ; the stones burned your hands.

The other museum in the town was more crowded, but Ben liked the model villages and his Ayah liked the shady garden and the company of other Ayahs. She used to tell Ben stories that began in English : " One boy come. One boy see one, two buffalo . . ." Then it almost always turned into Tamil. But Ben understood in a kind of way and liked these stories just as much as Humpty Dumpty or Jack and Jill, which Judy used to tell him in proper English.

After she had seen the dance at Kalakshetra, Judy suddenly found herself understanding the big bronze statues of the God Siva as Nataraja, Lord of the Dance. She saw just how those arms and legs and finger positions which used to seem so odd were now clearly the right ones and the only ones for a real, perfect balance. Once she and Lakshmi had met on the landing of the museum where those statues stand and looked at one another and nodded ; they were in the secret together. Lakshmi had a little Nataraja of her own and she used to put single flowers on and around him, very carefully and precisely.

This was in her father's flat, which was modern looking and nearer the middle of Madras. You hardly missed a garden because there was such a lovely wide veranda full of flowers in pots. The rooms were big



and looked down into flowering tree-tops, gold and orange and violet, and everything seemed to work properly, the fans and the fridge and so on. There were quite a lot of books, but they were mostly about engineering, and there was a Chinese picture of a bird which they both liked though it wasn't an accurate, careful kind of picture, but just a few lines and blobs. Lakshmi's mother was nice and pretty, but didn't speak much English. Her father was almost always in a rush but used to joke a lot when he wasn't; and he was very very fond of Lakshmi.

Judy didn't go to the flat very often. When Lakshmi was there she used to slip through the fence to the next door house hoping she'd be seen and welcomed. She was never entirely sure about Lakshmi's grandfather, but perhaps he didn't think she was real anyhow. Once or twice Lakshmi's younger sister, Sarasvati, who was rather a plain little girl, and more often her brother, Kandan, came to stay. You always knew him by the noise; he was always rushing round shouting. But more often it was her baby sister, Parvati, who was a bit younger than Ben. She had silver anklets with little bells and would spend hours playing with them. After a bit first Ben and then Judy began calling the lady at the back Ammani Patti, as her grandchildren did, and obviously the lady liked it.

Soon she began talking quite a lot to Judy. One day sitting on the veranda she told her about her own life. "My father and mother were very orthodox," she said. "Me, too, they wanted me to be very orthodox



Brahmin. But I wanted education. I cried and I shouted, oh, I was a bad, bad girl!" She smiled to herself. "But I got that education I wanted. It is so. I went to college. There was one English teacher—oh, how she helped me! And I meant to do great, great things for my country. It was while you English were here and we wanted freedom—but then I was also reading so many noble and honourable books in English! For one year I was teaching and then my family were so very orthodox and they wanted that I should marry. I said that I would only marry a scholar. And they said, very well, they would find me a scholar." Again she laughed a little. "It was so, my Judy."

"And then you did get married?"

"Yes, indeed. And it came that I had all this struggle, but my daughters did not care to be educated: not even to take their B.A. So we married them and I have more grandchildren. But my son, Kumar, he did care and he did not wish to be a Sanskrit scholar but rather to do great things for his country as I had wanted. So he became an engineer and took training in Europe though we were a little afraid at first. But he is our good son. And now Lakshmi, she too cares."

"What do you think she will be when she is grown up, Ammani Patti? Will she be a dancer?"

"I think she will dance but yet not be a dancer. I think too, she will go to college and perhaps teach."

"Or she might be a poet," Judy said. For Lakshmi

had told her some lines of poetry she had made and Judy thought they sounded lovely.

“Yes, she might be a poet, my Judy. And you?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Judy. “But I am afraid I can’t write poetry or dance. Ammani Patti, do show me some of the things in the house!”

The inside of the house was so nice, though there wasn’t a radio or even a gramophone; Judy was never tired of it. There were wide seats, almost like beds, with cushions on them, usually embroidered, rugs on the tiled floor and little carved tables, and pictures. Some of the pictures were framed photographs of solemn people and sometimes these had garlands hung on them, but there were two pictures that Judy specially liked. One was of Indian princes in long muslin skirts and gold-ended scarfs shooting at a target with little bows. Behind them there was a garden all laid out with paths and flower-beds and flowering trees





and peacocks. There were mango trees only an inch high but you could count the mangoes on them. The other was of a lady beside a lake, her sari fluttering out behind her and a looking-glass in her hand. You could see the reflection of her face all tiny in the glass and there were spotted deer with delicate legs and big eyes venturing up near her and a few birds with long legs and curved bills. This, said Ammani Patti, was a picture of a kind of music which could only be played at a certain time in the day.

When Ammani Patti found that Judy liked these pictures so much, she showed her three others which she kept in a carved box. One was of elephants fighting, lashing their trunks at one another while little men with spears looked on. The second was of a very grave and upright man with a beautiful belled hawk, cream coloured and fierce, standing on his wrist, and the man was riding under a stormy sky, on a grey horse with dark muzzle and tail, and red painted legs. The third was of a partridge, every feather beautifully painted. Surely, thought Judy, this was accurate enough to please even her father! They were old pictures, Ammani Patti said, which had been in the family for a long time, and so had the carved box which she took them out of so carefully.

Then there was a vina that lived in a glass-fronted box, its bowl and stem inlaid with sprays of ivory flowers. Sometimes Ammani Patti took it out and began singing to it, quavery, sad songs mostly that would suddenly change time. They seemed altogether



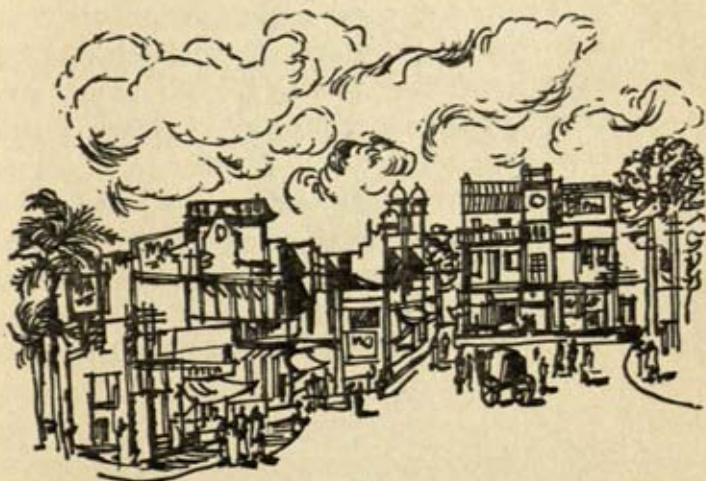
different to the cinema hits that the girls at school used to sing.

There were a lot of nice boxes in that house, especially the spice boxes in the store room, the big locked chests for rice and dal and things ; there was always a lovely smell there from all the spices and fruit. But in a way the most exciting room in the house was the puja room, a quiet little room, the shining floor cool to one's bare feet, with pictures of the Gods and a lamp and flowers. Ammani Patti never minded taking Judy there ; she used to talk about her favourite Gods in a kind of family way as though she and the Gods and Goddesses were all part of the same thing.



*Independence Day*

THE BIG monsoon clouds were beginning to mass up and people began to talk about whether it mightn't rain. You would hear that there had been a thunderstorm somewhere else, would hear the growl in the air. "If it rains," her father would say to George the cook, "you will close all the shutters, you will do this and that." And George said, "Yes, yes," and paid as much



or as little attention as he ever did. But the clouds always seemed to break up and lose themselves in the hot, cruel sky of the Indian July and then Indian August. "We'll all have to be there for the Independence Day party at the hospital," Judy's father said.

"Yes," said her mother, "the tailor's coming round." She looked at Judy. "There's that length of khadi with the elephant design——"

"Oh, Mother," said Judy, "need I be all over elephants?"

Her father knew that what she really meant was that she didn't want to wear khadi, which is hand spun and woven in the villages. Those who care about the ordinary poor men and women of India wear it because they know it helps to get a little money and food for the poorest villages. The highest people in the government of India wear it, whether they are men or women. It is rough, coarse material, and there is an old joke about khadi being the stuff that dhobis use for breaking stones. The dhobis are the washermen and they bang away on stones at the edge of the water with anything they get, which means that sheets and pillow-cases don't wear very well and one should always get one's dresses washed at home. Her mother, too, knew Judy didn't like khadi, but she had a feeling that one ought to like it whether one did or not. However, her father said, "Why don't you go over to Handloom House and see what they have? I'll stand Judy a new dress!"

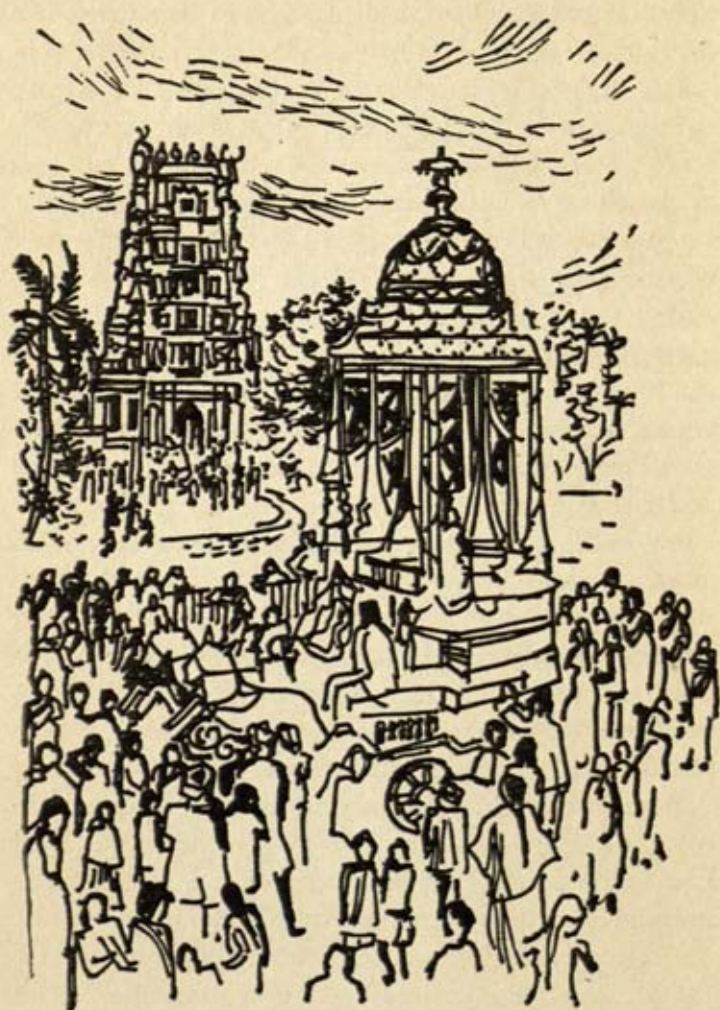
"Oh, yes!" said Judy.



So off they went. Handloom House was one of Judy's favourite shops and she managed to edge her mother into getting out lots and lots of rolls of cotton material, all hand woven but much finer than khadi, because the cotton itself is spun by a machine which does it much better than people's fingers. They had raw silk too, stiff and heavy, glowing with colour but too hot for summer. Judy tried to persuade her mother to get a sari length of pinky mauve with a border of black and pale yellow, but it was a question of what the tailor could do, and, anyhow, six yards, which is a sari length, was too much. Finally they got a striped cotton in red and pale yellow and two kinds of blue; the stripe would go up and down on the skirt and round and round on the bodice with no sleeves.

It wasn't always easy getting the tailor to understand. He was a nice little man who used to come round to the house and sit cross-legged at the door without saying a word till somebody found him. He took things away with him to his little shop that was just a shed, and worked very fast. When he said it would be a long time you knew it might be as long even as the day after to-morrow. But not longer! He was good at copying, but not so good if you wanted an alteration, and Judy was nearly three inches taller than she'd been last summer.

Independence Day was a holiday and you knew it was because bands started playing the evening before and never stopped all night. There were decorations up everywhere and the Indian flag, green and white





and red with a wheel in the middle ; this is the hand-spinning wheel, the same kind that Gandhi used to use. And there were processions and speeches and everyone giving garlands to everyone else. Nobody ever seemed to think that because they were celebrating the anniversary of India's independence from British rule in 1947, this wouldn't include people like Judy's father and mother. Obviously independence had been a good thing : Judy's father and mother were good people ; and so they would be glad, wouldn't they ?

At the hospital there were flags and balloons and inscriptions and an enormous tea for everyone, including all the porters and sweepers and their families, who all somehow or another had managed to get into cheap and pretty clothes. The thin, sad-looking women had glass bangles on their arms and sometimes a silver charm or bracelet ; if they had, it meant they were carrying the family's savings about with them. One of the doctors made a speech to Judy's mother about all these low caste people, saying that there were no caste or creed barriers at the hospital, and Judy's mother said quite crossly, " I should hope not, indeed ! "

Some of the nurses were there looking very elegant, especially the nice nurse who had helped when Judy had her injections. But the rest were in the wards giving an extra good tea to the patients ; they would be having speeches too, but probably they would like them. After all, they didn't have wireless sets in the wards and very few of them could read, so even a speech was something special.



Her father had to make a speech, which was embarrassing to Judy but everyone else seemed to like it, and they gave him an enormous garland like a muff all made of very sweet scented flowers, white and yellow and pink with gilt tassels dangling off it. However, nobody was supposed to wear their garlands for very long; there were flowers and petals everywhere. Some of the Indian doctors had organised games, like musical chairs, and egg and spoon races, only nobody was going to waste good eggs, so they had little yellow lime fruit instead, which were just as difficult to hold in spoons. They all encouraged Judy's father, who was very hot, and tried to make him win. Judy won a balloon race and her frock was a success—the tailor had managed to make it big enough after all. But she did wish Lakshmi had been there; it would have been twice as much fun. Perhaps Lakshmi was over at the grandstand watching the procession or at one of the parties they were having everywhere.

They all sat down under one of the great tamarind trees which made a thick shade and drank pressed lime and orange. The Hospital grounds looked pretty with all the bright coloured saris and white suits, and the row of gold mohur trees all in a toss of flowers. Judy's mother was talking to some of the other doctors' wives and Judy was idly making faces at one of the daughters who was at the same school as she was. It was much too hot to get up and talk to her.

Then another of the doctors came and introduced his wife; she seemed taller than most of the other

wives, bigger across the shoulders; and somehow she seemed to hold her head higher and her clothes were just a little differently put on. She had a wonderful gold and enamel brooch on her shoulder. And before she'd been talking more than a minute she told them she came from the North, not here. She talked very good English. "Are you finding housekeeping difficult here?" Judy's mother asked. "Do you find you have to learn Tamil?"

"Tamil? Never!" said the doctor's wife, tossing her head. And then, "But you don't know what India is like—the real India, if you haven't been to the North. Delhi! Agra! Oh, and the hills! Not like this dirty South."

Judy was thinking someone would hear and be offended, and then suddenly she knew the doctor's wife didn't care if they were, in fact rather wanted them to be! How awful grown-ups were. Then a boy came running up, a nice-looking boy, rather lighter coloured than some, with very wavy black hair. "My son Haridas," she said. The boy shook hands and smiled. When both their mothers had started talking again he began talking too; someone brought a leaf of banana chips, which are like potato chips, only nicer, and they both put out a hand for that.

Then there was a tug-of-war, and everyone got swept off to join in it. Judy thought she'd never heard such a noise in her life, everyone shouting; it sounded as if they were terribly angry, but really they were all



pleased, especially when her father's team won. Then there was a children's tug of war ; the girls tucked in their saris, and the boys pretended to be awfully strong. Judy and Haridas were both on the same rope and both dug their sandals in and put all their weight into it. When they were pulled over the line they were both convinced that if it had been just them against any two of the other side they'd certainly have won. They went back to their tree simply dripping with sweat and drank masses of a kind of Indian Coca-Cola-ish drink. For a little it seemed cooler, then suddenly Judy realised this was because there was a cloud over the sun, and then everyone was rushing for their coats and then to the hospital veranda. There was a great stunning clap of thunder and down came the rain.

Ben didn't like it at all ; his lip trembled and he had to be picked up and cuddled. Judy thought it was rather fun, and after all, everything was almost over. Haridas liked it too ; he jumped about and his neat white shorts got splashed with new red mud. Only it didn't cool things as much as one would think ; after all, why should it ? The rain wasn't cold rain, but warmish rain.

The car went splashing back to the house and of course George had only shut some of the shutters and the end of Judy's bed was soaked. There was more thunder about and a lot of rather horrid creepy crawlies had come out, flies and hoppers and things that Ben called putchis, which means something rather nasty in Tamil. Judy went to the fridge for more really cold



water, and her father dropped in a little pinch of salt to make up for all she'd sweated out at the sports.

After that Judy seemed to be seeing quite a lot of Haridas. He was a nice boy and reminded her a bit of John ; he was interested in cricket and all that. They seemed to laugh about the same things. She knew her father liked his father: " A man with high professional standards," her father said, and that was almost as good as being accurate ! But her mother was rather silent about his mother. Well, if his mother didn't like Madras and kept on saying how much better Northern Indian food was, it didn't really matter. And she did make the most delicious sweets, really gooey ones, dripping with stickiness, but crisp underneath, or else a melting fluff of sugar. Her curries weren't as hot as Madrassi curries, and had different flavours in them. But as to Southern India being so dirty—well, look what the Madras people said about the North !

Once when Haridas had come over to their house Judy thought of taking him through the gap in the fence and then she thought—no, it wouldn't work. Just the same, when they were all swimming, she would either dive with Lakshmi and her friends or with Haridas. She did notice that Haridas's mother was one of the few grown-up Indian ladies who actually went swimming in the pool. Most of them came with their children, but sat about eating ices or drinking tea themselves. " I shan't be like that," said Lakshmi, " even if I have a dozen children ! "

But now the monsoon had really begun, and the

thunder drummed round the sky; there were great pools of flood water right across the road. But they went away quickly into the thirsty ground and everything steamed and people got cross. There was one week when Ben wasn't well and they were all worried. Ammani Patti sent over some specially good fruit but he didn't want even that. He got better but not quite well, and plans were made for everyone to go up into the hills just as soon as Judy's term was over.

This way she didn't see either Haridas or Lakshmi for a few days and when she did see Lakshmi there was a funny feeling about it. It was as though Lakshmi didn't want to be friends any longer. But Judy was worrying about Ben and she didn't pay too much attention or ask Lakshmi if there was anything wrong.

How nice it was to get up into the hills again! They were near a lake with boats and suddenly Judy found herself wanting to row. It seemed quite odd to want to do anything like that, to want to run or jump. It was wonderful to be cool at night, even to feel like snuggling under the blanket. It wasn't so nice to think of all the people in the Plain getting hotter and hotter. "But do Indians mind the hot weather as much?" she asked her father.

"Very nearly as much," he replied. "If India had a decent climate, the whole picture would be different. Nobody can work properly in the hot weather."

Some of her Indian friends came up to the hills, including Haridas, who turned out to be able to row quite well. He mostly won when they raced one another



in the little boats. The stamp collecting boy was at another hill station. Ben got quite well again, though he did look a bit thin. At the beginning of October there was a puja day—a day of worship when everything was blessed. The car was hung with garlands and an offering of fruit and flowers put in front of it. Ben's push-chair was blessed; his Ayah Mary was a Christian but she wouldn't have missed having this done. There was a very nice old priest who did it and only asked for a few rupees.

The hospital was blessed the same way, all the wards, and especially the operating theatre and the X-ray unit. Of course it was a holiday. There was so many holidays in the Hindu calendar; Judy supposed it was mostly because almost everyone had rather dull lives, working hard and not getting much money and lots of them not even taking Sunday off, so they really needed the holidays and a bit of fun. But the people with interesting work didn't really need them, so perhaps if everyone got something they were really interested in to work at, they wouldn't want to take these holidays. That was the sort of thing that was so awfully difficult to know about.



*Conjeevaram*

IT WAS still hot when they came back, though not so damp. The first monsoon had stopped, and the second hadn't yet come. At school, the girls were beginning to talk about what they'd do at Dipavalli, the next holiday, and the shops had started putting things into their windows—"your Dipavalli gift"—almost like Christmas in Europe or America, and just the same, an excuse for shopping. Even the poorest people would try and manage to have something new to wear, even if it was a made-over from someone richer. But Judy had gone with her mother to choose new cotton saris for Ayah and Vasiki and George's wife, who sometimes came over to the house with two little children trailing after her and another on her hip.

The neighbours over the lantana hedge were making all kinds of preparations. Varanti showed Judy a whole box of fireworks—and perhaps this year she'd get a real gold bangle! The neighbours over the wall would be sure to have an even bigger box of fireworks for a show-off, and far more sweets.

And then Ammani Patti called over the morning

glory hedge and told Judy she was going to Conjeevaram to get new saris. "They are more beautiful there," she said, "and I will take you if your mother says you may come."

"Oh, lovely," said Judy, "and will Lakshmi come?"

Ammani Patti said nothing for a moment, then: "You have not quarrelled with Lakshmi?"

"No!" said Judy. "Only—I do hope she hasn't quarrelled with me."

And she began to think that she hadn't seen Lakshmi about so much. Of course, the first week at school was always a bit of a rush, with no time for anything, but at the swimming-pool Lakshmi was always just going away or something. Judy had meant to tell her all about the boats on the lake and about where she'd been, only somehow it hadn't happened. Perhaps it was all right.

Judy's mother said she could go with Ammani Patti, but she must be sure to remember always to take off her shoes before going into a temple. "There are a hundred and eight temples at Conjeevaram," she said, "and I expect Ammani Patti will want to visit some of them."

They started quite early in the morning, just after dawn, and before the heat was too fierce, driving out past St. Thomas's Mount on to a country road. The driver was a young man who seemed to be some kind of cousin. He kept whisking round cows and goats so close that Judy began to feel a bit jumpy and he blew

his horn a great deal. Sometimes there were monkeys on the road, and if they were squabbling about a piece of fruit or something, they didn't get out of the way till the last possible moment.

At last they began to see the spires of Conjeevaram sticking up a long way ahead of them. But no, not exactly spires, more like thick, tapering towers, wider one way than the other, going up and up and then cut off, never ending in a point like church spires. That was how they looked when the crowded streets of Conjeevaram had pulled the visitors in. Above the gateways of the temples these towers rose, twenty stories high, thickly encrusted with stone Gods and symbols, arms waving or blessing or holding sacred things, not a square foot undecorated, the whole thing crowned with great carved peacocks' tails. There was a kind of squirm about it, as though in a moment all the statues might ripple into a dance; Judy recognised the postures of balance, the raised and elegant foot, the bend at knee and hip.

They left their shoes outside the gate and went in. Here were courtyards with the stone hot underfoot and steps up to vast shrines, surrounded by pillars, each one different, each one a story. Ammani Patti had told her before of the many shapes of Vishnu, the tortoise that carries everything on its back, the boar, the man-lion—here they were, and here the splendid garuda bird with its curved wings, and often Krishna with his flute and Ganesa with the elephant's head. Here were the goddesses, Parvati and Lakshmi for

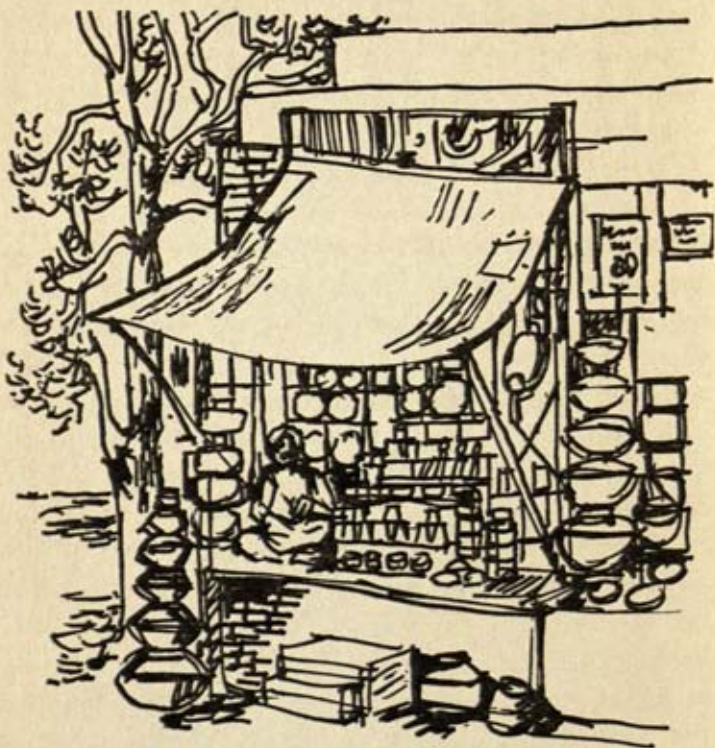


whom so many of her friends were named. Yes, and there was frightening Kali with her necklace of skulls and her tongue sticking out in a dumb yell ! All were carved in the round, a forest of stories known to all Hindus, unendingly repeated in picture and song. Right inside there would be a kind of bed for the God and sometimes a little image of him or her or both, dark with dust and oil and incense smoke, decked with marigolds, sometimes clothed with cotton or jewels. At some of the shrines Ammani Patti would go in, asking a priest to look after Judy. She would come out with ash stains on her forehead, and perhaps a few flowers or a half-coconut. Judy didn't like to ask her what she'd been doing, and yet all the same, she felt that Ammani Patti wouldn't have minded ; the Gods and their worship was something one took for granted in a casual friendly kind of way. It wasn't a churchy, frightening feeling at all—only it was so hot, one could hardly drag oneself across a temple.

Most of the temples had tanks in them—stepped squares of water for beauty and coolness. Across one of them Judy saw what she thought for a moment was a statue, then knew for a great temple elephant, his forehead and cheeks painted with patterns in grey and red. A wonderful, enormous, tamed elephant, yet not so beautiful as the wild elephants among the wild grass.

In the cool of the arches under the enormous towers there were little shops, or rather stalls, with all sorts of things, ordinary toys and celluloid dolls which, if

one looked, were really the Gods and Goddesses, pictures of the Gods and pictures of politicians all mixed up, all very highly coloured, sometimes with



spangles, and sometimes looking very like film stars. But that wasn't the kind of thing that worried people. There were always, always beggars, sometimes coming up and demanding, sometimes just sitting.

In one temple there was a statue of Siva doing a high



kick, and Ammani Patti told Judy the story of Parvati challenging her husband Siva to a dancing competition. And Siva won because he dropped his ear-ring and then put it back into his ear with his toes. "But Parvati couldn't do that because she was a lady," Ammani Patti said, "Look, there she is, watching him—but she is really happy, look, she has a smile!" It was nice, thought Judy, to have Gods that could just do things for fun, that thought of fun as being—well, important enough for the Gods.

But, oh, it was hot! Even if the car stood in the shade, one burnt one's fingers on the door. "Come," said Ammani Patti, and swept Judy with her into a sari shop. Immediately the man brought out saris and scattered them, tossed them, on to the table—and he brought cups of sweet coffee too. Here were wedding saris, heavy with brocaded gold, silk in every colour, checked or embroidered, with borders of fishes and elephants. Judy specially liked the shot silks, but they were all lovely. Ammani Patti chose cotton saris for all her servants, a green silk, the colour of young banana leaves, for Lakshmi, and a butter yellow for Sarasvati as well as a piece of printed silk for a little skirt for two-year-old Parvati. Then she got dhoti cloths for her husband, fine cotton with a narrow gold stripe at the edge. There were several other people choosing saris, and the long table was heaped like a gorgeous flower-bed. Suddenly Ammani Patti got up. "Come!" she said, and then, "we shall find some good saris."



"But aren't those good?" Judy asked.

Ammani Patti smiled. "You shall see."

Just then they heard drums and flutes, and there, coming round the corner was a great high wooden cart like a throne, painted and gilded, and on it, under a canopy of immensely fretted and complex carving, a little swing, carrying two God dolls. There were huge wooden wheels creaking over, and it was being pulled along by ropes, each with a hundred or more people on them. "They acquire merit by pulling the Gods," said Ammani Patti.

"I think they like doing it!" said Judy, for everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves like anything, shouting and laughing, while two old men sitting up on the car played to them.

"All the better," said Ammani Patti, "the Gods want us to like serving them."

Here the streets had stalls selling all kinds and colours of fruits and spices, and houses with low verandas and carving over the heavy wooden doors. They went through one; there was a courtyard and all round it weavers sitting at looms, throwing fine threads across and across with their shuttles. Sometimes two weavers would be working at one loom, one on the border of a sari, the other on the main part. They were simple-looking looms, the weights dangling into pits, the long warp threads knotted in a seemingly careless way. But the skill was in the setting up of the patterns and the tension. The weavers looked well, and unhurried, and Ammani Patti told Judy that they made

good wages, better perhaps than bank clerks who had been to schools, even the little boys working with their fathers, who certainly seemed to like what they were doing.

From there they went through into a small room with a smooth marble floor, and were given cooled coconut milk with a dash of lime in it to drink. Here men were reeling up gold thread, a distaff between the toes, or winding it on to a frame. It was really a very thin silk thread, silver plated, and then very finely coated with gold. Ammani Patti picked up two hanks. "Do you see, Judy, how this one shines, and how heavy it is in the hand? It has the most gold on it." But Judy didn't really see; she liked the silk floss thread, like the hair of a blonde princess. The head weaver showed Judy how the gold thread was weighed; the price of the sari depended on the amount of gold in it. "When my old saris are quite worn out," Ammani Patti said, "I burn them up, a whole heap of them, and the silver or gold that was woven into them is left."

There were two saris here, one a turquoise colour, like shallow water in sunlight, with a golden border of stars and leaves, and the other a blue so dark it was almost black, with a silver border of elegant little animals that might have started as camels. In the end Ammani Patti took them both; two men folded them, pulling the material tight over sticks, so that it was utterly uncreased. They got into the car and drove off again, with all the windows open—and yet the air that



came in didn't cool them. They drove past streets and stalls and temple gates, each with its tower of Gods, and so on to the Madras road. They ate fruit out of a basket and tossed the skins out ; it wasn't untidy here, for goats or monkeys would come and eat them.

The trees were stained with red dust, and every lorry they passed was in a haze of dust ; the bullock carts went creaking slowly by. The land was all dry and brown and would be now for months. How thin the poor cows were ! How different from Ammani Patti's two cows. They were called Kauveri and Godavari after the two sacred rivers of the South, and they flowed with milk. But Ammani Patti bought them hay and rice straw, while these poor cows had to wander about trying to get at leaves or bits of thorny bushes. Judy remembered seeing shallow lakes in all the country round Madras last February, before the hot weather, but now everything was dried and cracked, though in some of the old lake beds there was a grey-green growth of melon vines with yellow flowers and pale-golden fruit globes. There had been a little grass and a few vegetable crops after the first monsoon, but the heat had withered most of it away.

"I do wonder when the rains will come back !"  
Judy said.

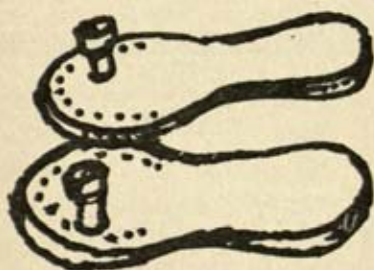
"After Dipavalli," said Ammani Patti. "And here we are back at our house, Judy. And here is my Dipavalli present for you—I think this is the one you liked." She put a parcel into Judy's hands—and it was



a shot silk sari, blue shot with green, the colour of a kingfisher.

“Oh,” said Judy, “oh——”

“But remember,” said Ammani Patti, “you may make it into a dress, but you mustn’t wear it until Dipavalli morning!”



## 6

### *Dipavalli*

GEORGE WAS very busy making sweets, but somehow it wouldn't be quite the same thing in their house as in a Hindu house. Dipavalli was fun, but it didn't mean so much. When Judy slipped through the fence, the smell of the delicious things that Ammani Patti was making floated through the garden. "And I shall have the new, special rice," she said; "but it is not only ourselves. My dear cows will have their Dipavalli. I shall feed them myself, with my own hands, and they will have the same food that we have. I think perhaps they remember last year and are looking forward to it."

There was no school, of course, on Dipavalli day. What happens is that everyone goes round visiting all morning, giving one another presents and cakes and sweets. Then they sleep it off in the afternoon; most of them have been up since long before dawn. And then come the fireworks, bang, bang, bang. The difficulty is that once the fireworks start they never seem to stop, nobody wants to go to bed, and nobody seems to mind what anyone else does. All the little

boys have crackers which explode all over the place, and it doesn't even stop that day—fireworks, at any rate, seem to go on and on till most people get a bit bored with them.

There was a bit of excitement because the son of the people over the wall—the one who had the motor bike—dropped a match in among a lot of fireworks which all went off in every direction and some of the guests got burnt. Judy's father went over and bandaged them up and took two of them to hospital in his car, but nobody seemed much worried. Ben found it a little frightening, though, and Judy's mother got quite cross. "People who haven't enough to feed their babies are spending every anna they've got on these silly fireworks!" she said.

Judy enjoyed all the first part of the day. The shot silk had been made into what would have been an extra special party dress in England, but Vasiki brought it in that morning and she had to put it on for breakfast. Several people came to visit them, including Haridas and his mother, who kept on saying that Holi was much more fun really, but these wretched people in the South didn't keep Holi—ah, they should come to Delhi and see a festival being properly kept! Haridas had a yoyo, and he gave one to Judy; they took them out on to the veranda and tried to see who could do it best.

The nicest thing, though, about the Dipavalli festival, was the lights at night. The first evening, which was new moon, people started it off by putting



out a couple of lamps at either side of the door. Then, every night after that until Khatika, which is the night of the full moon, a fortnight later, they put out more and more lights. Most of them were just the same little pottery lamps that people had used for hundreds of years, filled with oil that gave a small, steady flame. It didn't matter if they broke, because they were very cheap, made by potters who worked in sheds off back streets, making things like lamps and bowls and flower-pots, decorating them with a thumb mark, a twist in the clay, sticking to the shapes that had been worked out by their forefathers as beautiful shapes, just in the same way that dancers stuck to the point of balance.

That first evening Judy's father drove over to the hospital; he knew there would be a few emergency cases like the people next door, and he wasn't sure which doctors would be there. He took Judy with him, and it was lovely going through all the streets dotted with lights. Even the thatched villages had their little lamps, and everyone sounded very cheerful.

Judy had hoped she would see Lakshmi, and certainly Lakshmi must have visited her grandmother and been given her new sari. Judy did wish she could have seen her in it—she was certain to try it on then and there. But there were a lot of cousins, she knew that, and perhaps Lakshmi was visiting them all, getting and giving presents and sweets. Varanti from next door had brought over a plate of special nutty

fried cakes which her mother had made, carrying them in a big leaf with a piece of muslin over it and a few flowers just to make it look nicer. Most Indian married ladies would have thought it all wrong to buy their Dipavalli sweets; they usually had special recipes that they were very proud of.

It was, in fact, almost Khatika before Judy saw Lakshmi again. By now the houses were fully lit up with rows of lamps outside the doors and on the window sills and along the verandas. Some places had big decorations of coloured electric lamps strung up, but this wasn't as nice as the small flickering ones which a little breeze would sweep into a long waver of light. Decked out with these lamp necklaces, even the ugliest houses looked pretty for a bit. But, by Khatika, the holiday feeling had gradually faded out, the fireworks had finished up with a last pop and bang, schools had started again, and grown-ups were going back to work. Dipavalli was over for this year.

Judy, going to the Club with her father for a swim, went off past the pool to change into her bathing-dress, and there was Lakshmi in the middle of an ice-cream; she couldn't very well get up and go away. But she frowned and looked in the other direction. "Whatever is the matter?" Judy said.

Lakshmi sat quite still, only tapping with her fingers on the top of the table. She was wearing the new green sari over a cream-coloured bodice. Suddenly she said: "So you think we are dirty. Dirty Tamils!" Her voice sounded dry and angry.



"I don't know what on earth you mean," said Judy, really puzzled.

"You and your friends," said Lakshmi, "your new friends from the North!"

"Do you mean Haridas?" said Judy, feeling stupid and awfully worried.

"What is it to me what his name is?" said Lakshmi.

"But it's him you mean—Lakshmi, he's only a boy——"

"Only a boy! And his mother is only a woman, I suppose," said Lakshmi, and turned her shoulder towards Judy.

"Oh, it's her!" said Judy. "Look, Lakshmi, I think she's a silly ass, and I don't believe the North is any nicer than here. But that isn't Haridas's fault, and it isn't mine either. . . ."

But Lakshmi was not going to listen; she had made her mind up. "These are the ones who despise us, who try and rule us from Delhi! But we will not be ruled! It was bad when you British ruled us—bad, bad! But if they think they can do it, they will learn. Telling us we have to speak this Hindi! They are worse than you were!"

Oh, dear, thought Judy, this is horrible politics, she's talking through her hat—and I don't know how to stop her. And Lakshmi got up from the table, not even finishing her ice, and walked out with her lips tight. Suddenly Judy thought of how she had been in the fierce bit of the Bharatnatyam dance, the tigerish bit. That Lakshmi should have been a tiger to



her! Two fat hot tears came uncomfortably out of Judy's eyes, and went splosh on to the tiles. That was how she was standing when her father came out in his bathing-trunks ready for a swim. She told him just what had happened, and he was quite upset.

"This is the kind of thing that might break up India," he said, "and that would be the most dreadful pity. It could be one country, strong and stable, just as soon as they can clear up all this poverty. It *is* one country. And the people who want the States to break off because of some nonsense about language, don't know the harm they're doing! And of course silly women like Haridas's mother do as much harm as—as——"

"A pit of serpents," said Judy. It was a phrase she had come across at school, and she had never had a chance of using it. She added: "But Hindi is a bore."

"I don't see how an official Indian language can be avoided," her father said. "But the Hindi speaking people have no business looking down on other people's national language. Nehru doesn't do that. You know, Judy, there are dozens of national languages in India, and some of them have books and poetry and songs that ought never to be forgotten. And that goes for Tamil. If only we took the trouble we could all learn a whole lot of different languages."

"I couldn't," said Judy, and then: "But what can we do about Lakshmi? I do feel awful, Father!"

"I'm afraid we can't do very much," her father said; "but perhaps it will all come right, Judy. Suddenly. Things do, you know. It may be partly the hot weather, everyone gets edgy. Come on in, old girl, and we'll have chocolate ices while we're drying off. How's that?"

Swimming, even when the water seems much too warm, and eating chocolate ices is soothing. But Judy couldn't help worrying. "What is the North really like?" she said.

"Well, it looks a bit more prosperous than this," her father said, "and people wear more clothes. But—I'll have to try and take you, Judy, before we go home."

"Oh, can we really go?" said Judy, and thought that over for a bit. But then she said: "Lakshmi was wearing her new sari, her Dipavalli sari, the one I helped to buy."

Judy's father grunted sympathetically. He looked round and then said, rather secretly, "There's another thing that may be eating Lakshmi. Her father, Kumar, has been in trouble. He found things weren't right with one of the top boys on one of the projects—what I mean is, Judy, this other man, somebody above him, was taking bribes, and Kumar got furious about it, but the other man had more pull. . . . Well, they managed to get Kumar dismissed, and I don't know if he's got another job yet. It won't be so good, anyway. Of course, some people say it's because Kumar was born a Brahmin, and there's this feeling against

them now. Anyway, the top man was a Brahmin too! But I'm not sure. Only it may be making Lakshmi feel that she's being persecuted."

"Oh, that is unfair!" said Judy. "Can't you do anything, Father?"

"No, indeed I can't!" said her father. "We've just got to hope that right will come out on top. It often does, you know, even in real life. Tell me, Judy, will you be awfully pleased to go home to England?"

"I do miss John," Judy said, and as she said it she thought in the same breath of Haridas, who had reminded her of John, and she wondered if she ought to stop seeing him—if it was a choice between him and Lakshmi—but was it? "And there aren't so many extra tangles in England," she went on. "I mean, castes—and some people being so poor—and all these Gods. . . ." She dived in and came up beside her father, thinking something different. "Only I'd hate to swim in that awful old indoor swimming-bath now. And not to have mangoes."

"You still bend your left knee," her father said, "otherwise it would have been a nice dive. You'll





have to get that right before we go home. Look, there's Mother coming with Ben."

"Lakshmi dives so much better than me," said Judy, swimming slowly into a shady patch of water. "Like dancing. I can't somehow get my legs to go right. Father, when we go back to England, couldn't we go on keeping Dipavalli?"

*The Rains*

NOW, IN late October, the clouds of the second, the more serious monsoon, were beginning to pile up, and the thunder flickered all night. "I do hope arrangements have been made, in case there are floods again," Judy's mother said nervously. Her welfare work was all to do with poor people, who for one reason or another were homeless and hungry. Men came into Madras from their villages, hoping for work as coolies, pushing and carrying heavy loads, always straining and hurrying; but perhaps they never got any work at all, even that. Their wives and children came trailing after them, and perhaps there was nowhere to live, unless it was in the shade of a wall in some street, under a tree; but only if you were lucky. When the rain burst on them they were soaked, like beasts in a field, and afterwards as patiently as cows or sheep in a field they waited for the sun to dry their clothes and themselves, and the rain to steam off them back into the air.

The welfare people, most of whom were Indian ladies, did something for some of them, but more and more came. And it meant an awful lot of writing letters to State departments, asking for stores which they

knew were there and not being used, only it was nobody's business to give anyone else leave to use them. Judy's mother used to complain of the amount of tea drinking and telephoning and being sure one hadn't offended people, that one had to do before anyone got a move on. Now she was trying to accumulate food and clothes and dried milk and other stores, in case there was a sudden call for them.

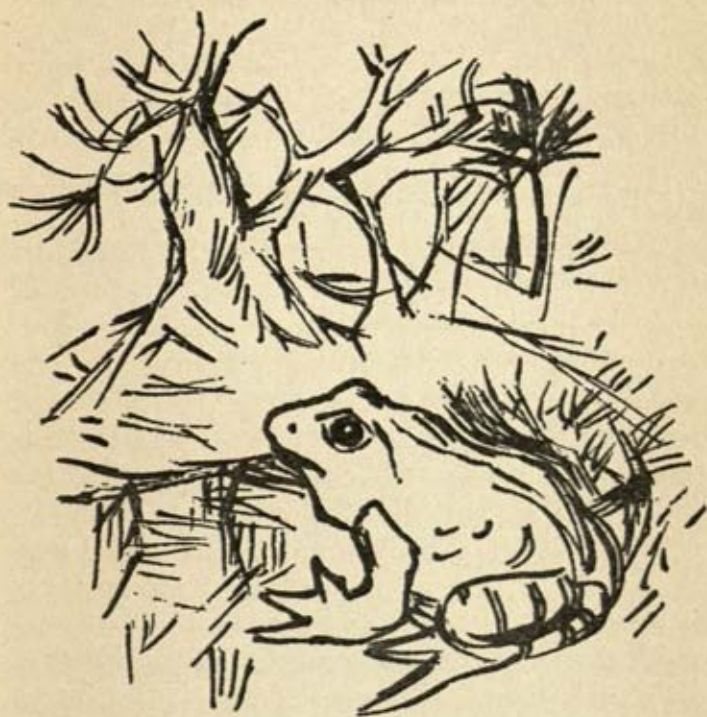
Of course, they weren't the only people doing welfare work. There was the Ram Krishna Mission, which, Judy's mother said, did welfare work all over India, feeding thousands of people, running free dispensaries for medicine and schools as well. "But they don't like to have people who aren't Hindus working with them," she said, "and most of the other missions want to convert people away from being Hindus, and I don't think that's right in India, so I don't like working with them."

"Silly old missions!" said Judy.

One morning Judy woke to hear Ben squealing with pleasure. He had got out from under his tucked-in mosquito net, gone downstairs, and then found delicious lakes and puddles of water in the garden, and now he was prancing in them, in nothing but his bare skin, and dodging the mali. So the thunder last night had really brought the rain. How nice the garden was with all the leaves and flowers washed—but what a lot of flies as the sun came out again and the heat began! At first it was fun for Ben splashing around in the red mud, and even rather fun for Judy, but soon they got hot



and it was a nasty sticky kind of heat. By the afternoon the water was away, and only the mud left. One way and another a lot of mud got into the house, mostly in Ben-size footmarks.



The next night there was more rain, not quite as much, but still, enough to lie, and so it went on night after night. Sometimes the whole garden would be full of tiny little frogs, so that it was quite difficult not to tread on them. Slowly everything began to get

soaked. Water ran across the roads, there was water lying in the hospital grounds where they'd had the tug-of-war. And there was water in among the houses and cooking places in a lot of the poor villages that have edged in between the big houses in Madras. Palm lattice and palm thatch houses don't keep out the monsoon rain, and people looked draggled and dirty. The rivers were rising, creeping over the low-lying land where the buffaloes used to roam about, cropping bare any bushes and wallowing in the shallow pools with nothing but their heads showing.

Everyone wanted the monsoon to go on, for without it there would be poor crops, especially the rice crop on which everyone depended. But nobody really enjoyed the steamy weather when one couldn't even sweat properly. Even comparatively well-built houses didn't stand up to it; most of them had their floors laid directly on to what, in the dry weather, was hard-packed earth, and seemed as solid as stone. But after a few days of rain this began to melt. One day the floor of the garage just gave way under the car; they had to build the wheels up on to bricks before they could get it out. Ben thought it was great fun, and so, really, did George and the mali; they liked things to happen.

Going visiting was almost impossible. "Thank goodness, no more tea parties!" Judy's mother said. But one day they had a visiting doctor to dinner, and one or two people to meet him. Judy came down in her Dipavalli dress before dinner and handed round the



nuts and shell-poppadums, the pressed lime and orange juice. She liked the visiting doctor; he was from Bengal, and he had a kind, soft, spreading smile, and quoted poetry which sounded nice even though she couldn't understand it; she noticed that he was one of the ones who wear khadi. But just when they were sitting down to dinner, crash came the rain; George had only a few yards to come from the kitchen across the tiny yard, but he arrived soaked to the skin—and his beautiful curry that he had taken such pains with looked as if someone had emptied a bucket over it.

The other very horrid thing was that in spite of the heat, one's clothes were never properly dry, after they'd been washed. Tablecloths and sheets and pillows, they never seemed really dry. If Judy left her sandals lying for a day or two, there would be green mould on them. Needles and pins got rusty. Gummed envelopes stuck together, colour came off toys. Judy sometimes found herself longing for a breath of cool, dry air.

The Mass Radiography van had been coming back from a village and got stuck—the road had been swept away ahead of it. If only I'd been with it, Judy thought. The young doctor who had been in charge came over and explained how they'd had to spend the night in the van, and had heard all sorts of howlings and barkings that were probably village dogs, but might have been jackals, or even hyenas, or just possibly wolves. Or there might have been elephants, Judy thought, elephants coming quietly out of the jungle and moving around the van all night. One wouldn't see them at all,



only there'd be soft swishings of trunks and perhaps—does one smell elephants?

Once the rains were on, school games came to a complete stop. The netball ground was under water. Even the great tamarinds with their thick, thick, layers of leaves and great dark trunks, which had been so good a shelter against the sun, were letting the rain through. The roof of one of the class-rooms suddenly started to leak, luckily in a Hindi lesson where Judy was being bottom of the class. The Hindi mistress looked at it with and without her glasses, which everybody said she only wore for swank, and then she went all fluttery while the girls in the class all talked at once, then she picked up the end of her sari and went scuttering out and they didn't have to finish their exercise.

Judy went to rather a nice birthday party that Tara, one of the girls, had. There were pink and green cakes with little bits of silver paper on them, which one could eat, and fruit salad with tinned cream. It was one of the big houses with wide verandas, and a courtyard inside, which had been partly covered over and decorated with flowers, some real and some paper. They had a magician down in the courtyard and themselves sat on the balcony or leant against the posts. Lots of people came out on to the other verandas round the courtyard; they all seemed to be uncles and aunts and cousins. The magician took chickens out of some of the girls' hair, and even a snake—but they all said it hadn't got any poison teeth. He made a dear little tree

grow, and he found a gold watch—or at least it looked gold—in Judy's pocket, and then made it disappear. If only she hadn't felt so sticky inside her frock that she could hardly move, it would have been an even better party. But nobody felt like playing games. There was a swing hung from the rafters of the veranda, decorated with flowers and streamers. It was nice and cool swinging, and they took turns.

Sometimes Judy saw Haridas. His father was a very good doctor, and her father always enjoyed talking things over with him. But now she felt uncomfortable whenever she saw his mother. She never quite knew what had happened, though she thought it must have been his mother talking as she did sometimes at the Club, which had upset Lakshmi and her friends. Only it just wasn't a thing she could do, to tackle a grown-up about something like that! And if she did, Haridas's mother might say something cross and biting, and she did hate that. When she went to their house, they had northern-style food, shingara, the four-cornered patties with curry inside, and fried sweets dripping with sugary juice and rounds of pale halva with nuts, better than toffee, though one needed to drink loads of water with it.

But all the time she missed Lakshmi, and she didn't know what Ammani Patti thought about it. And then an awful thing happened; she found one day that the gap in the fence had been mended, so that you couldn't even see through. It wasn't their own mali; he shook his head and pointed to the other side. So Ammani



Patti had done it—why, why? Judy cried herself to sleep thinking about it, and not knowing what to do, and the dreadful feeling went on for days and days. At last she felt she couldn't bear it any longer. On a steamy hot afternoon she went round by the road, in at the front gate, and into the garden. Ammani Patti was there, and Judy made a namaskar, nervously. The nicest of the two cows, Kauveri, had just calved; it was a lovely calf, creamy with a black muzzle, and everyone was patting it while Kauveri stood by puffing great milky breaths. "It's about Lakshmi," Judy said, all out of breath and uncomfortable.

It didn't seem as if Ammani Patti had heard. She looked at Judy with sad eyes. Then she began to feed Kauveri from a bowl of rice cooked in milk.

Judy caught hold of the end of her sari. "Please, please—Ammani Patti! I haven't seen Lakshmi for ages and I can't bear it and I know she's cross with me—but I never, never said northern people were the best, and I'm not friends with Haridas's mother—and I don't want to go to Delhi——"

Suddenly she felt Ammani Patti's small, firm hand closing down on hers. "You tell me," Ammani Patti said slowly, "that what my Lakshmi thought—is not so—is an illusion. . . ." And all at once Judy saw that Ammani Patti was nearly crying.

"Of *course* I never said what she thought—but she didn't give me a chance to explain—oh, Ammani Patti, couldn't you tell her?"

Ammani Patti wiped her eyes with the corner of her



sari. "Perhaps, my Judy," she said, "you will write to Lakshmi. Then, it may be, she will believe."

"Write?" said Judy. "Can't I see her? Isn't she in Madras?"

"No," said Ammani Patti, and then: "I will tell you. It is so." She stopped a moment, then went on: "Lakshmi's father, my son Kumar, the best of sons, he is an engineer." Judy nodded; she remembered what her father had told her. "He was working with this great engineering firm, there was a good salary, a car, everything. They were making great engineering works; he was happy. But there are bad people in this firm, men who try to get all the money for themselves. Men who cheat over contracts. And my Kumar comes to know this and he tries to stop them. They offer him money to be quiet. He says no, no! He says he will stop such wickedness, he will tell the Government. Then they are angry. They think how can they make things bad for my Kumar, my good son. It is so. They speak about him: lies—wicked lies. But it is politics and you see, he is born a Brahmin. So now, my Kumar, he has lost his good place with this wicked firm, but he has found a small, small post making an irrigation canal with the Central Government in a village far from here—oh, a long, long journey. And all have gone with him, my dear daughter, his wife, and with her Lakshmi and Kandan and Sarasvati, and my little Parvati. They live in so small a house, in this village." She wiped her eyes again.

"Oh, dear," said Judy, "I knew something awful

had happened, but it won't be for always, Ammani Patti. My father says that the good always wins in the end. . . ."

"So I believe," Ammani Patti said. "But the end may be very far. And my son and his children are also far. See, Judy, you shall write a letter to Lakshmi." She went into the house and found a piece of paper ; her pencil, like everything else, was in a knot in her sari. She put down an address. "This is where she lives now. See, it is called Ponneri, but you must put all these letters and numbers and this other word, because it is so small a village !"

"Oh, thank you !" said Judy. "I will write—I'll write to-night. And please—please——"

"Yes," said Ammani Patti, "we will open the fence again."

*The Floods*

THAT NIGHT, after the sticky day, there was a tremendous storm. The passage at the bottom of the stairs, where the ground had sunk and cracked the cement, was sopping wet. Ben was frightened, and howled, and even Judy was quite glad when her mother came in to see that she was all right. The rain made such a powerful kind of noise that you felt it meant to hurt you. It went on all night, and in the morning the floods were deeper in the garden than they'd ever been before. When Judy went up on to the roof under the clearing sky, she saw first a great lake of water in Ammani Patti's garden, and the cows drinking. Across the lantana hedge the children were sailing leaf boats. Little Rama Krishna had sat down with a splosh. Beyond, there was a glitter of new ponds in among the trees and across the road and everywhere. The main road into Madras was blocked, and she couldn't possibly go to school.

A bit later the telephone rang and her mother answered: "Yes—yes. . . . And the water still rising! . . . You've got them into the school for the moment? Good! . . . Yes, you bring along the blankets; I only



hope we've enough. Mrs. Gnana Ammal has the Unicef milk. Ah, she's getting it loaded, splendid. . . . Someone to help to mix it. . . ." Her eyes roved around. "I'll bring Judy. . . . Yes, of course she can come, and she'll make herself useful. Unpleasant sights—goodness me, she's eleven years old."

Judy had been trying to finish her letter to Lakshmi, which was a lot more difficult to write than she'd thought. Now she jumped up, feeling all warm with excitement and grown-up-ness. "Oh, Mother, is it those people you were telling me about beside the river?"

"Yes, poor things," her mother said. "Their little houses have been swept away, and I'm afraid some of them may have been drowned. They're outside the city boundary, and it seems to be nobody's business to look after them. I believe the Rama Krishna mission are helping some of the others, but not these. Of course, they ought to have realised what was coming, and moved up the banks themselves. But people just don't do the sensible thing and that's all there is to it. Tell George to make us some sandwiches."

"How are we going to get there with the road blocked?"

"They'll send the van for us the other way. It'll get through even if there are a few inches of water. We'll have to mix lots and lots of milk, it will be very dull, but I knew you'd want to help."

"It won't be dull," said Judy; "not for me. Is this the milk from the United Nations countries?"





"Yes," said her mother. "And tell George we'll want the big Thermos of water. Be sure not to drink any other water. The floods will make it even messier than usual."

In half an hour the van had come splashing along the road, and honked at the gate—if it had turned in it would have landed in a lake! Judy and her mother edged round it and into the van, where Mrs. Gnana Ammal, a large, cheerful lady in a blue cotton sari with a lot of gold stoppings in her teeth, was sitting among cases of Unicef milk powder. There were some cushions, and they all curled up while the van made its way out. You could see that the floods had dropped in the three or four hours since the rain had stopped, but what was running off the land was getting into the rivers and they were still rising. Once they were stopped by one of the Madrassi policemen who wear tall hats like mitres, and told to try another road, as the approach to a bridge was flooded.

At last they got near the place where the really bad flooding was. They began to see groups of people standing or squatting by the road side and looking very miserable. And then ahead of them they saw the brown, crawling spread of water, in among the trees and bushes. A couple of men came over and started unloading the Unicef milk cases. "Come on, Judy," her mother said, and they started along a path under mango trees which was just out of reach of the flood water. In one place there was a hollow and the water deeper, very dirty and full of every kind of mess;



Judy saw a poor drowned goat and a bit later some hens, dead and draggled.

"Look, Judy," her mother said, "there's the school we've got them into."

It was a long, low building with mud-brick walls, and at least they would have a roof over their heads—or some of them would, for there were dozens of families who had their sad little bundles of things outside and who were trying to put up leaf and branch shelters.

And then Judy saw a woman lying by the path in a wet, dark sari with her eyes shut. "Yes, Judy, the poor thing must have been drowned, and they are trying to find her relations," her mother said. And, somehow, Judy didn't mind. The wet, dead woman didn't seem to be hurt or unhappy; she was just—not there.

There was a fire burning on a piece of raised ground, and a big pot slung on sticks over it. Mrs. Gnana Ammal sent one of the men hurrying for tins and earthenware bowls, in fact anything that would hold milk. "Now you and I are a team, Judy," she said, "your mother is dealing with the blankets. I shall pour the hot water in, and you must stir, stir!" She began to empty milk powder into the various things she'd got hold of. She gave Judy a wooden spoon. "Tell me as soon as you have a bowl ready, and go on to the next."

So Judy settled down to it, stirring the hot water into the milk powder, going from one bowl or tin to

the next. Mrs. Gnana Ammal had tucked up her sari and pulled the end tight round her waist—as Lakshmi used to before a dance, Judy thought suddenly—and she was bustling round, looking like one of the village women, but much more cheerful and businesslike. She had organised mothers with young children into a line, and was giving out the milk. The ones who were waiting sat quietly in the mud watching her and Judy. After a bit, Judy wished some of them would come and help, but none of them did. I suppose, she thought, it's because none of them have ever done anything except whatever it is they always have done, and stirring milk powder isn't part of it. But she got hotter and stickier and more tired, and the milk powder seemed to smell nastier and to get more and more on to her face and hair. Out of the tail of her eye she was watching the edge of the water creeping among the bushes and ditches, and it was getting a bit nearer all the time.

At last they stopped, and she had a long cold drink out of the Thermos, and a sandwich. But it wasn't nice eating the sandwich because all the poor flooded-out people watched her, and she felt she ought to give it to them. Mrs. Gnana Ammal had brought a double brass box with rice and curry in it instead of a sandwich; it looked much nicer, and Judy wished her mother would bring that sort of thing instead of sandwiches, that always curled up at the edges. Mrs. Gnana Ammal ate it very neatly with her fingers; then she scraped out what was left into a



leaf and a thin brown hand came out for it from the crowd.

The village which had been swept away had been on the bank of the river, far above where the water had been all summer, and gradually the people of the village had moved down nearer to it. Then in a few hours, in the dark of the night, the river had come swooping up at them and snatched away their houses and their hen-coops, and their tethered goats and their fishing-nets and tools. Some of them, like the drowned woman, had been asleep when the water came into their houses, the noise of it less loud than the noise of the rain. Some of them had managed to save a bed and a few pots, others had lost everything. Most of them had cultivated little plots of land which did well enough because they were made of fertile river mud, but now these were under water and any crops there were had been lost. It wasn't so bad perhaps for the ones who came into Madras and worked as coolies, but few of them had managed to rescue any food, and the wives with their babies were sitting on the ground, just being hungry and hopeless, as people have been so often in the long history of India.

Judy was feeling horribly tired; it was getting hotter and hotter, one could hardly breathe, and the smells were getting awful. There was the smell of all those people crowded together, the smell of unhappiness, and the smell of the flood water, and all it was bringing with it, and somehow the smell of the dried milk on top of that was more than Judy could stand.



But it had got to be done, and there was Mrs. Gnana Ammal bustling about, and showing her gold teeth as she smiled at some woman who was making an effort to get things going or some child who was looking after a little brother.

And then there was another van on the road, and who should get out of it but Haridas and his mother ! Haridas came running over, he actually seemed able to run in the heat. "What are you doing, Judy ?" he said. "Let me help !"

Judy pulled herself together and began mixing the milk very efficiently. "I don't suppose you could do it," she said.

"Yes, I could !" he said. "Here, give me that spoon !"

"Well," she said, "I'll let you have a try. Look, Haridas, you have to make the powder into proper milk—no lumps. When you've got a tin done, take it over to Mrs. Gnana Ammal. I'll watch."

So Judy sat back and watched Haridas, pretending to be very fussy, at first anyhow. But he was doing it properly, and just as fast as she had done, and it was so lovely just to sit back and do nothing. Haridas's mother had gone off to help Judy's mother, who said afterwards that she had been very efficient, in spite of talking so much. Judy stopped watching Haridas and began to watch the edge of the flood water. It wasn't going up any more. It was dropping and leaving behind it a line of mess, twigs and fruit husks and a dead monkey—wasn't it ?—and bits of rag—there were

two village women looking through it to see if they could find anything worth having. Mrs. Gnana Ammal had come over and taken a large clean hanky out of the fold of her sari. "Put your head on that, Judy, and lie back for a minute—no, you needn't go to sleep. . . ."

It was rather nice, all the same, to lie back and to have a clean hanky between oneself and the smelly dust and the ants. One might shut one's eyes for a moment. Like this. And suddenly Judy heard Haridas saying: "We'll need another case of milk—let *me* open it!" And the shadows had shifted round—oh, and the water was a long way down. She must have slept for ages!

By now the village people were more or less settled, all the babies had been fed, and the ones who were outside had made some kind of a shelter with branches and blankets. For it would rain again to-night. But even if the river rose beyond where it had been at the worst, they would be safe in the school, which was on a bit of higher ground.

Judy noticed that Haridas, like herself, had got dried milk into his hair and all over his shirt. He was getting a bit tired, and was quite pleased when Judy took a turn at stirring. But they didn't use more than one other tin that evening. All the rice and grain they had brought had been distributed, so at least the people had all had something to eat. They got into the vans again and drove back to the town. The clouds were piling up in the north-east for more rain. It was horrid to think of all the people who hadn't got proper roofs. But at the same time it was nice to think one had been

able to help. The roads were all washed over with red mud where the floods had been.

"I couldn't get to school to-day," said Haridas. "Could you?"

"No," said Judy; "and I do hope the floods will be over that bit of road to-morrow!"



*The N.E.S. Area*

JUDY WROTE her letter to Lakshmi, and crossed out a lot and got it smudged and sticky so that her mother said she ought to rewrite it. But it was too hot for that and Lakshmi wouldn't mind, and in the end she put it into an envelope and when they went to Spencer's she took it to the Post Office there and saw that the stamp was cancelled. Then she had an orange drink in Spencer's café while her mother got some butter and biscuits and aspirin and things, and then they got a new kettle from one of the shops that sell things made of stainless steel and brass and copper; a narrow cave of shining things strung up and piled on shelves. The brass and copper ware was the prettiest, especially the ordinary water pots that you could get in all sizes, but they were not as practical as stainless steel, which is made in India now. Her mother asked the man to put her initials on to the handle of the kettle, and he took a little electric drill and buzzed away, and there were the letters.

"If I'd wanted to get that done in London, it would have taken weeks," her mother said. It was the same with any kind of small making and mending; for

instance, her father had got the side piece put back on his spectacles in no time, and the man seemed to enjoy doing it. After that they asked the garage how long it would be before they got their new tyre—for that sort of thing took much longer than at home—and then they went to the India Coffee House and bought a pound of coffee and each had a cup. And all the time Judy was wondering how long the letter would take to get to Lakshmi at this place Ponneri, and when she was likely to answer it.

The floods had gone down quite a lot. Her mother had been over to the camp with Mrs. Gnana Ammal, and people were pulling themselves together again, and the body of the poor drowned woman had been found by her sons and properly burnt. But a lot of the village people wanted to stay on in the school, which had a better roof than their own little huts had ever had. But that wouldn't do at all because the children who went to that school had to be taught somewhere. So the important thing was to get the village people to build themselves new houses as soon as possible. Judy's mother was trying to get some Government help for that.

After three days Judy began to think she might have an answer. But perhaps a letter might take longer than that to get to a little village, where nobody received any letters from one month to the next. But a week went by and another week, and still no letter. "It might be difficult for Lakshmi to get a stamp in a little village with no post office," her mother said. But if



Lakshmi had really wanted to answer, Judy thought, well, she'd have managed somehow. So perhaps Lakshmi didn't want to answer.

She went over to Ammani Patti to ask her what she thought. But Ammani Patti shook her head and wouldn't say. Only that letters from Kumar sometimes took a long, long time. Judy must be patient. It was good to learn to be patient.

Gradually the rains stopped, and all of a sudden Judy realised that it was less hot and much less sticky. The orange season had begun, which almost made up for no mangoes; there were so many different kinds of orange: the very orange-tasting tight-skinned ones and the sweeter, juicy loose-skinned ones, and all sorts of other citrous fruits as well. They had begun to mend the holes in the roads that the floods had made, and the brown dust and stalks in the garden had turned into long, coarse grass, that the mali had to keep on swishing away at with a great knife. Everyone started feeling more alive. It was the end of the really hot weather.

The only thing was, the swimming-pool had got rather muddy and full of leaves and was being cleaned out, so they couldn't swim there for a bit, and Judy's mother had started fussing about sea-bathing because of the sharks. But nobody had got eaten or even nibbled and the fishermen went on going out in their little rickety boats made of two or three planks lashed together, so Judy couldn't see what the fuss was about. Haridas went out swimming beyond the breakers and



carried a knife, but then his father heard about the sharks too, so he was stopped. And still no letter came.

"I think we should go for an expedition," Judy's mother said. "It won't be too hot now and the roads will be all right again." And her father said, "Yes—well, why not go to one of the N.E.S. villages and see how things are going on?"

Judy looked puzzled. Her mother said: "Don't you remember what I told you about the National Extension Service that helps the people in the villages to do all the things they need to do for India to become prosperous? We'll go out to one of the areas and have a look at cottage industries and schools and new crops and things—it won't be dull, Judy, it's really exciting when people who've been poor and sat on for thousands of years suddenly start doing things on their own. We'll have a picnic and then we'll stay at a rest-house. . . ."

"Might there be an elephant?" said Judy. It had been from a rest-house in the hills that they had started on the elephant, that time when she had seen all the wild animals.

"I don't think so," said her mother; "but in India one just never knows what one will find."

In the end they decided to go for a whole week-end to one of the farther-off places. Ayah was to take Ben to stay with some friends. George would make sandwiches, they would fill all the Thermos flasks with water. They would take oranges and—yes, they would take nuts. They would be sure to be able to get green

coconuts on the way. Judy packed her things for the night, and they took bedding-rolls; the rest-house would have Indian beds with webbing across them, and if one had a padded cotton quilt on the top of that it was very comfortable.

They had left Ayah and Ben the night before, and themselves started early in the morning just as it was getting light. It was lovely with all the birds singing and almost cool. They drove out of Madras, past little shops just taking down their shutters and bullock carts and people walking in to work. Then they were clear of the town and the fields spread out at each side of them, but where they had all been dry and brown and miserable through the long months of summer, now they were sheeted with the beautiful translucent green of the young paddy, the rice, planted in the shallow water and deep mud that the rains had left. In some of these fields, divided one from another by low mud ridges, people were still planting, men and women wading in the water with bags of tiny rice plants which they were re-rooting in the mud. In others the paddy was already thick. For miles and miles it was greener than an English spring, and sometimes they passed broad, shallow lakes that the rain had left, reflecting the blue and tranquil sky into mud-brown water, so that the colour one saw was a wonderful turquoise. The lakes lapped round the trunks of thorn trees and were dammed back so that they could be used for irrigating crops. There were small flowers growing round their edges. Here and there were fields of sugar



cane, and in some of the villages Judy saw the very simple sugar crushing cylinders which people could work for themselves. But there was a factory in the distance, and a few loaded carts going there. Other crops had been harvested in summer, cotton and mustard and so on, and now were being sown or planted again.

They passed boys driving flocks of goats and village markets and women waiting beside wells or patting cow-dung cakes on to walls to dry and use for fuel. Judy's father kept on seeing people who were ill or hurt and worrying about them. There were so many, and they had to bear so much pain. Unless they could find a free dispensary, it might cost them a whole anna, about a penny, to buy a single tablet of aspirin. A village merchant might buy a bottle and sell them like that, making far too big a profit. But no poor person could possibly afford a whole bottle.

Sometimes the road would be being mended, and then dozens of people were swarming on it, women in saris and men wearing next to nothing, carrying earth or stones in baskets, sieving, trampling, doing all the things for which richer countries have machines. Once they went through a little town; there didn't seem to be any taxis, but instead two-wheeled pony carts, with the body of the cart made like a big, round-topped box that you could sit in, sometimes with curtains behind, and painted with the prettiest little pictures of gods and castles and lakes, while the pony trotted along, gay with bells and plumes.



They turned off the trunk road on to a smaller one ; it had been eaten into by floods in several places, and they had to go carefully over the bits which were being mended. They stopped for lunch and some monkeys came and finished their sandwiches. Judy took a photo of them to send back to John, but still she wished it had been curry. Her mother seemed to think Judy liked sandwiches better, whatever she said. And then they saw a sign saying : N.E.S. Development Area.

Then there were a lot more signs and it looked as if there was some building going on ; there was a big, thatched hut called Social Centre, and some labels on plots of land with crops or heavy-looking sugar cane. There was a signpost pointing to the Rest-House, and they went along and left their things. There was a young man waiting for them there, an excited young man who was so interested in what he was doing and explaining to them that sometimes he couldn't remember the English words, and then he beat his hands together with impatience. He had a jeep and rushed round with them, showing them how the village women had joined together to get sewing machines with a government loan, which they would be able to pay back in a few years if they worked hard. " And then," he said, " they will have sewing machines of their own ! " Here were a couple of rooms with looms where other women were making cloth, and there they were stamping patterns on cloth from wooden shapes dipped into dyes. There they were

making pencils out of bamboos. "So quick!" said the young man, "the women make the pencil insides from clay and graphite powder—see, like cooking—and the men make the outsides. They showed us this from the Forestry Research Institute—up there in Dehradun they think of the poor people here, so far!"

This bigger hut was the Panchayet building. "The village Council meets here; they are in charge, we only advise, help, push! They look after the land. They distribute the fertilisers we get for the fields. Collect taxes, keep all clean." Here was a poultry centre with Rhode Islands and Leghorns to improve the breed of the village hens and make them lay bigger eggs. Judy's father was very much interested in the Union Health Centre that looked after fifteen villages, giving them free treatment if they were ill, and showing them what to do to keep well, and he asked lots of questions. Here was a family weaving palm leaf strips into matting, all part of the village co-operative. There they were making toys, not very good ones, but they would sell at a few annas and still bring in a profit. "To-day," said the man, "they cannot afford even one electric light bulb, though—look!—the wires go so near. But soon they will have saved! We will have the first light in the Social Centre. Yes, there are many of these in the villages. We have literacy classes, teach them to read: big men one evening, women another, or by day. School for the children!"

Someone came up and spoke to him in Tamil, and he poured out an answer. "Always they are asking



me," he said, "this and that. We are not enough helpers. But more come. Yes, and our planting programme—look, the young trees!"

These were fuzzy looking casuarinas, Australian trees that will grow in very dry hot places, so that the people could use wood instead of cow-dung cakes, and have the cow dung for fertilising the fields.

He didn't stop taking them round till it was dark, and said he would be there at seven the next morning, to show them the flood control works.

"Eight," said Judy's mother; and then, when he looked disappointed: "Well, half past seven!"

It was fun being in the rest-house and hearing all the night noises, and when Judy woke there were parakeets flying and quarrelling just outside the window, walking on the branches and holding green berries in one claw. They didn't even notice her, perhaps because she was inside her mosquito net and they thought she was in a cage.

The young man turned up with the jeep before they had finished breakfast. They went tearing off along a bumpy road. "Here!" he said, turning at a signpost. And the signpost said: "Ponneri."

"Oh, look!" Judy almost screamed. "That's the name of Lakshmi's village, it is, it is!"

"But, darling," said her mother, "there are probably lots of villages called Ponneri."

"But I know it is!" Judy almost began to cry, she was so excited. "It's got to be!" She jumped up to look better and banged her head on the jeep, which



had bounced over a stone, and then really began to cry.

Her mother was a little cross. "Sit down, Judy, and don't be silly," she said. But all the same, she leant over and asked the young man: "Have you got engineers in charge of the irrigation works?"

"Yes, yes," said the young man, "good engineers. Look, this is the new canal, it will stop the flooding..." And he poured out a lot of figures about it, but never gave the name of an engineer.

The new canal was brown with mud, but all the same, there were women and girls washing clothes and brass pots in it, knee-deep. Judy gripped on to her mother. "Oh, look, oh, look, there's Sarasvati!"

"Are you sure?" her mother said. "Are you really sure? Don't pinch, darling!" For she herself didn't recognise Sarasvati among the girls who were singing and scrubbing their pots with sand on the edge of the canal, all quite cheerful but all more or less alike in draggled old skirts and bodices.

"Of course I'm sure—oh, do stop!" Judy almost shrieked. But by the time her father had slowed down the young man with the jeep, they were a quarter of a mile on. "I'm going back," Judy said, and her voice trembled a little, because now she was going to know about Lakshmi.

Where they had stopped there were a few huts and some shade trees, a big peepul among them with a huge contorted trunk and a little shrine in the middle of it. Under one of the great branches was a new-



looking thatched hut. "Here is the social centre for Ponneri area," the young man said. "See, there is a women's literacy class——"

"We'll just peep in and then we'll go back," Judy's mother said.

Judy was terribly excited, running a few steps and then stopping, not really knowing what she was doing, and now she ran towards the open door of the social centre. There was a low murmur of voices coming out of it. And suddenly she stopped dead, looked round at her father and mother and put her finger to her lips. Her father caught hold of the young man. Very slowly Judy went nearer.





*Lakshmi in Ponneri*

ON THE smooth mud walls of the hut, cool and easy on the eye, there were a few posters, with pictures and letters. There were no benches, only the floor and a roughly made blackboard. Lakshmi wrote the letters up once more in white chalk, slowly, so that everyone could see. She was tired, and her mind wandered sometimes ; the strap of her sandal had been broken and clumsily mended ; it rubbed against her toe uncomfortably. But, as the teacher, she thought she must wear sandals, they made her look older. All the rest were barefoot. In front of her some of the older women repeated and repeated the letters she wrote up, their lips moving. Yet nothing stayed in their heads. It was all too unfamiliar. That was hard on the young ones who could get on, who wanted so much to do this new thing, to read and write. The older ones wanted it too, but vaguely, as one wants some gift from the Gods ; if it was not given, that was nobody's fault and there was nothing to be done. The right kind of effort was beyond them.

Ought she to have two classes, Lakshmi thought ?

There was Valli in the front row, not older than herself, daughter of the village mason—if she could have a chance! Already she could read the headlines in newspapers and raced through the easy books. If only she could go properly to school, to college even. . . . But the older women would be offended if she split the class, and it had been difficult enough to get some of them to come. Lakshmi had pretended to be older than she was, but Sarasvati had let out her real age, and now, when things didn't go well, some of the married women muttered that they wouldn't be taught by a young brat like her.

Sometimes she felt like chucking the whole thing; she went back to the house and there was no fan, no really cold water, nowhere to be alone and cry if one wanted to. Her father had managed to rig up a shower and some curtains, but that was all. If it hadn't been for her father she couldn't have gone on. But it was the one thing that cheered him up, when he came back from the wretched little office with the tin roof, or more likely covered with mud from the irrigation works themselves. Then he would ask her how the class had gone, and listen and suggest things she could do. The women had come first to her mother to ask if she would teach them, but her mother had been too depressed; anyhow, the housekeeping was too much for her, even with the old servant they had. It was all so different here! Her mother had never worked, had always been waited on; she just couldn't face it. Sarasvati liked going round with the village girls, but



her mother had no friends. And she herself? Yes, she thought she had friends. Valli who was so good both at reading and at dancing. Another younger girl, Mohini, whose father was the headman of the little village to the west of Ponneri. Some of the social workers, especially one who had been at College, only they never had much time. But nobody—nobody like Judy.

She gave a start; she hadn't been attending properly. Slowly she wrote a whole word; they followed her chalk with their eyes and then, one after another, said it. She praised the quick ones. Then again, she wrote another word. And dropped back into thinking about Judy. For now it was too late. Judy, who had been such fun to do things with, more fun than most of her friends because one trusted her more. She was slower and deeper, Lakshmi thought, and I have thrown her away.

That day at the Club. If she had known how I was suffering . . . My father had just had the first blow, he had tried to prepare his wife and children, but they had not known then that it would be as bad a fall as—this. And on top of that to hear that woman whom Judy had been with, who boasted that she was a friend of Judy's parents and would make them think her way—that woman from the North, looking down on them, telling them what they should do, behaving as if she were a whole Government Department! I had to take it out of Judy, Lakshmi thought. I had to hurt her, to make her wince. Judy, soft-hearted Judy. I had to



turn my grandmother against her. It was my pain doing it, my pride : my hurt pride.

Now she began carefully drawing an outline map of India on the blackboard. She had done it often, but the class liked to see it being done, flowing out of the white chalk. As she put in the rivers she heard them murmur : Ganga . . . Kauveri . . . Godavari . . . Had her grandmother still got the cows ?

And then the letter. Her grandmother must have given Judy the address. Who else ? But her grandmother did not know how badly they were living. Her father would not tell his parents, and had forbidden his family to say. He wrote cheerful letters, speaking only of good things. And I would never say, thought Lakshmi with a shiver of pride, I would sooner die ! But if I wrote back to Judy it would be difficult to hide things. And then—then she might come. And it would seem that I had been begging ! From her, an English girl, the old oppressor ! No, no, let me drop out of her life like a stone into a dark tank.

She put in the towns. First of all, Ponneri—they knew it came first and called it out. Then Madras. Then other cities. Some of them knew, perhaps had once had some uncle or cousin who went away to seek his fortune in Bangalore or Nagpur or even farther, to Bombay or Calcutta. Then she began to ask them easy questions. Tell us about Gandhiji, she would say to one of the older women, one who was bad at reading but needed to be encouraged. And then the others would join in, and she herself might add something

she had read or had heard from her father. She had not tried to teach them any Hindi, that might come some time, at least for the brightest, or—was she so sure about Hindi, Hindi and the North? All her teaching and talk with them was in Tamil. Meanwhile, she must concentrate on the poorest, the ones who needed teaching most.

If only she could get some more music for her dance class! The blind man was a good enough drummer, but he had to be humoured. Sometimes he would not play at all what she wanted; clearly he felt he was the important one. They all so loved their dance class, especially the little ones, whose mothers used to come and sit in the dust so quietly watching them. The dance class had only started after the rains, when it got cooler. And never would have started, Lakshmi thought, but for her father telling her she should go on practising her dances, even without the music, because some day . . . And then it had come into her head that she would rather teach the children than dance herself, and he had encouraged her and spoken to one of the social workers who had found the blind man with the drums and got her some sets of ankle bells to help the children with the Kathak dancing.

Now she began to call them up to write on the blackboard themselves. She knew that some of the older women would not do this, perhaps never would. She got the younger ones. They wrote little sentences and then the others read them out, sometimes laughing

because it was so funny to see one of themselves able to do this. "Good, Valli!" she said. "Now write me a new sentence, one you have never written before."

But Valli was looking over her shoulder, through the open door, and her mouth was open with astonishment. What was it? Lakshmi turned, frowning a little. And there was Judy standing on one foot and holding out her hands. Judy!





## II

### *Judy and Lakshmi*

"JUDY, JUDY," said Lakshmi, "you have come!" It was all right. She, Lakshmi, she had kept her pride, had not written, but all the same, Judy, little white English Judy, dear Judy, she had come!

"Yes," said Judy, "yes—oh, Lakshmi . . ." And then it was cheek against cheek and tight holding of hands.

Suddenly Lakshmi said: "Come, Judy, come. You must see my class! Bring your father and mother!" They all came into the Social Centre, followed by the young man, who was so surprised that for the moment he had nothing to say. He knew that a literacy class was being taken by the daughter of an engineer, but he had not thought much about it.

Now the literacy class stood up and whispered and giggled. Lakshmi told them to sit down, and then made a speech about her visitors from England—oh, if only she had a map of the world! She was still holding Judy's hand in hers. Then she made the class show off, writing and naming places in India. But they were shy, so shy in front of the visitors, most of all Mohini, who had never seen a European face before.

Valli was better, but even she, though she did her writing on the blackboard with a rather trembly hand, could scarcely speak above a whisper. One of the older women at the back called out something, and Lakshmi answered her sharply. Discipline must be maintained.

"Now I will dismiss school!" she said. "For I have so much to say. Oh, Judy, how did you come?"

"It was all a kind of wonderful accident," said Judy. "But did you get my letter?"

Lakshmi squeezed her hand, for a moment didn't answer, thought of an easy lie, but knew it would be wrong. One does not lie to one's friends. "I got it, Judy," she said at last; "but—I was proud. . . ."

Judy didn't notice. "But you aren't cross with me?" she asked.

"No—no—and no!" said Lakshmi. "But—this village—and everything. I didn't want you to know——"

"But why?" said Judy. "You teaching a whole grown-up class! It's awfully clever."

Then her mother cut in: "This young man wants to show us more things, Lakshmi. Won't you come too? After all, it's your village! And you'll come back and lunch with us at the rest-house, won't you? Can we leave a message at your house?"

Lakshmi beckoned Valli—she didn't want to show them the house, not now, not yet! But Valli would give the message. Or should she go back and put on a clean sari, one of her old, good ones, her last Dipavalli

one? At least put flowers in her hair—she hadn't bothered, but now she wanted them so much! No, she wasn't going to leave Judy now.

The first thing they saw was another women's co-operative, but it was much more interesting with Lakshmi, who knew all the girls and women who were working. She told them all sorts of things: how this woman's three children had all died of the smallpox, but now people were getting vaccinated. That girl had been married to an old husband whom she didn't like. But this one in the spotted sari—ah, she had been married to a strong young man with a yoke of oxen and three cows; he was progressive and the rest of the young men all wanted him on the Panchayet, the village Council. Ah, yes, and that woman who is laughing so much while she turns the handle of the machine, she is a grandmother, and I think the money she makes will go as presents to her grandchildren.

She showed them too, the things which weren't working at the moment. "Here is where the cotton is carded during the monsoons," she said, "when it is not so dry. It is easier to work with it like that. Then we spin it. I have learnt that, Judy! But one day, my father says, when India is richer, we will card and spin with machines, which do it better than people, without lumps and knots, and only weave in the villages. But not yet, not yet."

"But can you really make a cotton thread—yourself?" Judy said.



"I am one of many Indian girls who can do that!" said Lakshmi, half laughing, and half making a face.

When Judy's mother wondered aloud what the village houses were like inside, Lakshmi took them into one; there was the veranda, and a room behind it, one room, one broad low bed like a table, a few jars and bowls of baked clay, and some piles of neatly folded but ragged-looking cloth; all that the family owned. "What do they have to eat?" Judy asked.

"Hot rice and vegetables in the evening. What is left of the rice, cold, with pickles in the morning," Lakshmi said. "Sometimes dal. But anything that can be sold—well, it is sold."

The houses and the little village paths were clean, never anything untidily thrown about. At the edge of the road under a tree, there was a tiny tea stall; perhaps if things were going well the men might go there in the evening for a small cup of tea or a pan. But most people lived, partly, at least, on hope.

Another industry thought of by the Forestry Research Institute was going on in a three-roomed mud hut. Old match-boxes were being dyed, pressed into blocks, and then thin pieces cut off them, in a coloured veneer, which in turn was being made into small trays and other boxes. Judy thought this was very clever indeed, but really not very pretty; her mother bought one, though.

"That is the house of the money-lender," said Lakshmi. "See the great brass locks on the door! If

only the Government could do all the money-lending it would not be so hard on people."

"What interest does the money-lender charge?" Judy's father asked.

"Oh, sometimes a hundred per cent interest in the year! Or more. It is not right. If they would even charge twenty-five per cent it would be less bad. Could someone not tell the Government?"

"There are some credit schemes——"

"Yes, yes," said Lakshmi; "but not enough—though we are grateful—oh, we are!—for what is done."

It must have been a lot worse before, Judy thought, if they are all so pleased about it now. The young man was giving some figures to her father—so many people. How could they all be helped?

At the rest-house, Judy took Lakshmi to her own room and saw her glance longingly at the bathroom that opened out of it. "Go on, Lakshmi, have a shower, do! Look, there's my soap and towel. . . ."

For a moment Lakshmi wavered, then it was too much—a proper shower that stayed on, not just a bucket with holes like the one they had now. Judy's soap that smelt a little of Judy—her towel. "Oh, Judy, if I could just wash my hair!"

"Lots of time," said Judy, and ran to her mother to ask for lunch to be put off for a little. Then suddenly she thought of something, went out into the garden of the rest-house and stole some flowers; some for Lakshmi to wear in her hair and some, she hoped,



for Lakshmi to put into hers, as she used to in Madras.

By the time they sat down to lunch with Lakshmi's long, wavy damp hair spread over her back, waiting for the flowers, she and Judy had told one another all sorts of things. Lakshmi had got news of her friends, the ones that Judy knew, and the latest about Ammani Patti—and dear Ben, who was now talking Tamil quite well. And then, just as they were eating a rather dull caramel custard, not quite hot and not quite cold, but Lakshmi was enjoying it, in came her father Kumar, in shirt and shorts and looking, somehow, older and thinner. He ate something quickly and then he and Judy's father went off for a walk in the direction of the canal. When they came back, a little later, they were walking very close to one another; Kumar's face was a bit smeared, and Judy saw that her father was wiping the lenses of his spectacles.

"They've been crying," she said flatly.

"If they have they wouldn't like us to know," her mother said. "We'll have some coffee. Well, Kumar, it's grand that we've found you again. Judy has been missing Lakshmi so much."

Judy and Lakshmi looked at one another. It was silly, said like that. But true. After a bit Lakshmi said: "But you will come to my dance class, Judy?"

"And then we will go to our house and my wife shall make us a cup of tea," Kumar said.

That is good, Lakshmi thought, they have been given time, my mother and Sarasvati will have pre-



pared, things will not look so bad. I would not have minded if Judy had seen—but not her father and mother. Although they are good . . . but all the same . . . She caught her father's eye, and he smiled, and said: "I brought you another sari, Lakshmi. I thought you would want it for your class." He gave her the parcel done up in old newspaper, and—oh, he had brought her Dipavalli sari and the choli, the bodice to match. That would have been her mother. And now she would be her proper self. "I'll run up to your room, Judy!" she said. Oh, and the lovely bathroom; one more wash with soap at the running tap!

Her class were all there waiting, and indeed there were quite a lot of other girls peeping round as they went back into the Social Centre. The class had swept it out, and to make it more of an occasion someone had found and put up a Coca-Cola advertisement. Judy's father went on with Kumar and the N.E.S. young man; the girls would have been shy to dance in front of him. The blind man was there with his drums, and Valli had put a mat ready for Lakshmi, with her block of wood and stick beside it. She took the little ones first, one at a time, beating out the Kathak rhythms and setting them right when they went wrong. Two or three mothers squatted silently in corners, watching. Then she took them all together, serious and excited. Then it was the turn of the bigger girls, but first Mohini had run up to her and touched the silk sari as though it had been something very

delicate, and suddenly whispered: "You will not leave us?"

"No," said Lakshmi; "no." And for the first time it came into her head that perhaps one day this would be over—the luck would change—she might after all leave them.

But now she must concentrate, putting as much of herself into the teaching as she had done in the old days when she was dancing. She made a link between herself and each dancer, a link of eyes and the echoing, biting knock of the wood, now gay, now sad, now leaping, now rocking. How the girls liked it, how they found a new life in the dance! At least she had brought them this.

"But do they dance themselves in the village?" Judy's mother asked her, at the end.

"Not much. They sit in a circle and move to singing. They make long story songs. The men dance more, but by themselves. I have only seen it from a little far off, watching from the huts with the other women. Perhaps they will dance more at Pongal; they will be happy then—that is, if the harvest is good." She stood up; the class put away the mat and the wood block. The blind man shuffled out, talking to himself. Would her mother and the house be ready? Yes, there was Sarasvati waving—and wearing a proper sari too, and flowers on her head.

Judy suddenly thought she had better not mention to Sarasvati that she had seen her washing pots in a dragged old skirt. They went along to the engineer's



house, which at least had a bit of fencing round an attempt at a garden. The chairs on the veranda were some of the old chairs from the Madras flat, and the teaset was the same. But Lakshmi didn't ask them to come into the house, nor did her mother. Judy thought there might be three rooms, but one was perhaps the kitchen. Somebody—was it Mrs. Gnana Ammal?—had said to her mother that there had been a sale at their house. They'd probably had to sell the valuable things—the radio—the best of the furniture. Oh, dear; she suddenly found herself aware that Lakshmi's mother, who used to wear rather a lot of jewellery, had only got one small necklace. But one mustn't, mustn't notice—mustn't let on that one had seen anything.

It turned out that Kandan had been having some kind of a rash, so Judy's father had a look at him and said he would send some ointment; no, it wouldn't be the least bother. The baby, still wearing her anklets, seemed to be the only one who was quite unchanged.

Lakshmi and Sarasvati and Kumar all came back to supper at the rest-house, apologising for having produced such a poor tea—if they had known in time. . . . "And you did like my class, Judy?" Lakshmi said.

"Oh, yes! I don't think I'd ever be able to teach," Judy said. "Wasn't it awfully difficult starting?"

"It was very difficult," Lakshmi said; "they thought I was too young." She remembered one



woman who had ended by leaving the literacy class with a flounce, saying she would not come back until there was a real teacher. But others had come. Yes, and kept on coming.

"You will write, won't you?" Judy said.

"But what have I to write about? You—you have seen all there is to see." Suddenly Lakshmi found herself very sad. Judy would go back—back to everything. And she would be left.

"Oh, but I shall want to know how the class goes. I shall tell Ammani Patti all about it."

"But don't tell her . . ." Lakshmi began, and then : "Judy, please don't tell her that—that I was wearing a nasty old sari—and about our not having a shower—and my father looking, looking——"

"I do understand," said Judy ; "really I do ! And I won't tell any of the girls either ! But all the same, I think you are awfully clever to be able to teach."

There were some things of her mother's lying about on the table at the rest-house, among them her dark glasses that she always brought along with her but hardly ever remembered to put on. Judy took them out of their case and put them on and looked at Lakshmi over the top of them. Then Lakshmi put them on. Suddenly she said : "Do I look quite old in these glasses?"

"Yes," said Judy's mother, "you almost look quite old—and if you want those wretched things, just keep them, Lakshmi. I never use them."

"Come and look at yourself !" Judy said. Sarasvati

ran after them into Judy's room and they all began laughing.

"That's a great girl of yours, Kumar," said Judy's father, "if there were more like her India would be a better place."

Kumar seemed really pleased, but said awkwardly : "Oh, well, it is true. We must help the villages." And then : "It has been good to see you. I thought we were—forgotten. Lost."

"Not a bit of it," said Judy's father, and put his hand for a moment on Kumar's.

Then the girls came running in. "I will keep them!" said Lakshmi. "Judy tells me I look intellectual. I look like her Hindi mistress—I think now my class will behave much, much better!"

*Christmas and Pongal*

KUMAR PUSHED away the paper with the pencilled figures on it; that was finished. And suddenly he dropped his head into his hands over the table. Everything was black. And then Lakshmi, his daughter, was patting him on the shoulders, sliding an arm round his neck. "Father, Father, what is it?"

He looked up and ran his hands through his hair. Then he tapped with his fingers on the paper, and said slowly: "All this, it is too easy. When I work it out, my mind thinks of other things." He changed to English, because he did not want his wife to hear and become more anxious than she was. "Lakshmi, when I see this, when I know that I, with my training and my experience, am doing work which is partly a clerk's work and partly a labourer's work and is so paid, and that this will go on and on, then I say to myself, I should not have interfered with—with the wrong things that were happening, in the old days at the office. Perhaps even I should have taken the dirty money. At least if I had done that my brain would still be used!"



"That is not what you really think, my Father," Lakshmi said, "and it will not be for always."

"I thought that, too, for a little. After your Judy came, last month, and her parents. It was strange to be oneself again. But now they will have forgotten me."

"They will not have forgotten," Lakshmi said, "nor will your own father and mother."

"I am glad at least they do not know how bad it is," Kumar said. "This morning the head engineer, the man I am working under, told me. . . . Oh, well, it is about the canal, and I know very well it is the wrong way to do it and it will not last well, it will waste the money that comes out of our taxes, but what can I say? I have to take his orders. And he is an ignorant man. I think of what we could be doing with the equipment we have, Lakshmi. We should be making tube-wells for each village. I believe, also, that they are on our schedule, but that is something I have not been allowed to see." He glared past her.

"Oh, Father, why not? And why are the wells not being built? It would be so good!"

"There is not enough profit to be made out of them—by some. And it is the same with the spraying against malaria. We should co-operate with the Health people, who are good, but too hard worked. But we do not. So, only a few areas are sprayed; then the mosquitoes spread again. You understand?"

"Yes," she said. And then: "Valli's brother, he has malaria."

"He need not have had it!" said Kumar, almost shouting. "But it is so, Lakshmi, this about the spraying is perhaps not corruption. It is just—laziness. That is not so bad, yes?"

"But it *is* bad, Father. And you—oh, you could do so much!"

"Perhaps not as much as I think," Kumar said; "but still, something. But you must never repeat any of this, my Lakshmi."

"Father," said Lakshmi, stroking his head, "it is a time of trials as it says in the old stories. When the hero is cast out into the forest and must fight with tigers. But there is no tiger here, only the head engineer."

"And I am not allowed to fight him!" said her father. But all the same, he seemed a little easier.

Then there was someone shouting to them, one of the villagers. Kumar went down and came back with a long-shaped paper parcel, and a letter. "They are for you, Lakshmi," he said.

Lakshmi opened the letter first; it was a Christmas card from Judy, an English one with a picture of snow and an old man with a beard in a red blanket—she remembered, they called him Father Christmas! Judy sent her love and said that her father and mother were sending something for the class. "That will be the parcel!" Lakshmi said, excited, and undid the string carefully and took off the paper and cardboard. "Oh, look," she said, "it is a map—two maps—a map of India and a map of the world!"







"But what can we send them in return?" her father said gloomily. "Lakshmi, they are good, but we cannot take their presents!"

Lakshmi caught hold of the maps. "I would take anything," she said, "for my class!"

Christmas cards came for Sarasvati and Kandan too, and even for Parvati, all from Judy. It had been fun getting them at Spencer's, where there was a big box of what Judy called "real" Christmas cards with robins and sparkles and snow and things. Of course, it was only a few people who paid any attention to Christmas, the Europeans and the Madras Christians, but there was a party with a magician at the Club, and several other parties, and parcels coming from England, including a box of chocolates from one of Judy's English grandmothers, which had got very hot in the post after it arrived, so that the chocolates, though still eatable, especially by Ben, were a bit squashy.

She had a letter from John, saying he was saving up and would give her a splendid present when she got back—that would be the Easter holidays—and take her himself, him paying, three times to the Pally if they ever had any decent films. Oh, dear, it was a long time since she'd thought of the picture-house at home! Home? Yes, and a lot of exams, but no more Hindi. No more India. And suddenly she found herself wishing she'd managed to learn a bit more Hindi, because then—what? How extraordinary it would be—how impossible—never to see India again. But she'd

got to, just got to ! Because after all, one can't stop suddenly being friends. One couldn't just not see Lakshmi ever any more.

They themselves had great fun with decorations. They pasted up coloured paper stars and things on their white walls, and then got a big branch of casuarina which looked almost like a proper Christmas tree, and planted it in the earth in a corner of the garden, for of course in Madras Christmas parties happen, not indoors in heated rooms, but out of doors in the cool of the evening. Then they made a list of children to ask. Some of them were three- and four-year-olds like Ben, and they would all want things that wound up and ran about the floor. There were jeeps and taxis and some rather horrid toys, like tigers eating buffaloes, and cobras eating rats, but that was the kind Ben seemed to like best. Of course they had balloons too. They were Indian balloons, much more fun than English balloons, because they were made in all kinds of odd shapes : teapots, and flowers, and lamps and animals ; and they squeaked when you ran your fingers along them. That was another thing Ben liked doing.

Judy had some of her school friends, including Tara, the girl whose birthday party had been such fun. But—oh, how she wished Lakshmi were here in Madras ! Her mother thought of giving these bigger girls toys or children's books, but Judy knew they were all much too grown-up for that sort of thing, so she chose purses and hankies and notebooks and tiny bottles of scent. There was the stamp collecting boy,



but now he was collecting match-boxes, of which there are hundreds of kinds in India, all with different labels. Judy chose a propelling pencil for him, which would be useful for making lists. She chose another, the same, for Haridas. There were two British girls and one Swiss, who had been at schools in the hills, and she got them presents from the Indian Handicrafts shop.

That was all rather fun, and then she asked Ammani Patti to come over and see the tree, when it was all decorated. Ammani Patti began asking questions, like why was there a star on top? "That's the shepherd's star," said Judy, and began telling Ammani Patti the whole Christmas story about the shepherds and the three kings—one from the East—coming to Bethlehem to find the baby in the manger. Ammani Patti liked it all, especially the part about the cows and the donkey looking on. "It is a much nicer story than the other Christian story," she said, "when the baby is a man and becomes a sacrifice." Judy was going to try and explain, only then Ben came running into the garden singing a Christmas carol at the top of his voice. He didn't sing very well, and he only knew one verse of "Noël, Noël." However, Judy sang it with him and Ammani Patti said she liked it. Then she said: "Soon now they will be keeping Pongal in this village, Ponneri. I had a quite happy letter from Lakshmi, and Pongal will be gay for her, yes! Sometimes I think perhaps it is better to live in a village."

"Yes," said Judy, "I suppose Pongal will be fun."



She wondered what kind of idea Ammani Patti was getting of the village ; she herself had been careful not to say too much, only about the class. Just now Ammani Patti had another child staying with her, a grandson, her second daughter's eldest, rather a spoilt little boy who always kept on crying for things. They asked him to the Christmas tree party, and he was one of those children who always want somebody else's present, and nice little Varanti from next door let him have hers, which wasn't really fair.

Most of the parties were fun, partly because it was cool enough by then to enjoy oneself, and in fact it was winter, though there were such lots of flowers. You got a bit tired of the trees never dropping their leaves, though sometimes one of them suddenly did, but only for a few days because almost at once the new green tufts started showing. You stopped using the fans altogether, and once or twice it got so cool at night that Judy almost thought of asking for a blanket. But it was never quite cool enough.

On Christmas Day itself the servants brought them garlands and everyone took photographs of everyone else, especially George's three children, and Vasiki's two, who came over that day. Judy's father stayed away from hospital, and they had a very nice kind of ice for pudding.

Some of the Scots people at the Gymkhana Club had a New Year party. Judy's mother got rather cross with them because they always drank a lot of whisky, and she thought it was a bad example. Madras is a

dry State, and you have to get a permit for things like whisky. Still, it was only once a year.

And then it was time for Pongal to start. In a city like Madras it is often rather an excuse for the boys to rush about and break up other people's things. But in the country it belongs, because it is really the harvest festival. The main crop of rice has been brought in from the paddy fields, and now people want to be sure the sun is going to come back after mid-winter, so they light bonfires, just as country people have always done all over the world. Lakshmi shut down her classes over the holidays; nobody would have come. But it did just turn out that one of the Government people came to the N.E.S. area exactly then, and of course he said he wanted to see a literacy class. It was somebody from U.P. where they don't keep Pongal, but something else instead, and Lakshmi was furious with the stupidity of the city people, the ones who talk so much about the National Extension Movement, but never think about real villages! Her father smiled a little, but half-agreed; they so often had people coming out from the cities, and some of them were supposed to be experts—experts in everything, which is quite impossible—and they gave stupid advice which the village people didn't follow. They knew better themselves.

"Ghandiji wanted us to come and live in the villages," said Kumar, "and perhaps we should. But to do our right work, and with friends. Not to be wasted!"



In a way it was worse for him than for Lakshmi, because he was half-way between the village people and the head engineer, who always pretended to be a big man, and was always going off in his car to the nearest town or even to Madras. So he didn't really have any friends. But Lakshmi had friends among her class, and they all played Pongal together. Everyone broke their old earthenware pots and plates and got new ones ; they were very cheap, and it was good for the potters. And the houses were all swept out and the rags thrown on to a bonfire which was lighted in front of the house to encourage the sun. There were some Pongal songs too.

On the second day they had a feast of the new rice cooked in milk and the rough cane sugar which has a strong taste, so that it is much more interesting than rice pudding. And on the third day they gave the same mixture to the cows and oxen, and then they washed them and painted their horns and decorated their yokes and harness. Even the buffaloes were decorated. Kumar had a rather thin cow, and he and Lakshmi and the other children washed her and then held her and started painting her horns. His wife had lived so long in a flat, it was years since she had painted a cow's horns. They were making rather a mess of it, but then Valli's father, the mason, came along and helped them, and in the end their cow, with one red horn and one green and little flowers painted over that, was one of the gayest cows in Ponneri.

There was some dancing too, but much rougher than



anything Lakshmi had ever seen, and a good deal of shouting with it. And it was the same in all the villages. On the bonfire night they could see the twinkling of the flames far away into the distance across the great eastern plains of India.

"I wish I could see Ammani Patti's cows," Sarasvati said. On other years they had always gone round to see them, and there had been coffee and cakes, and sometimes presents.

"Judy will go and see them, and perhaps she'll write and tell me," Lakshmi said. And so she did. For of course Judy and Ben were across the fence watching Kauveri and Godavari and even the older of the two calves, which had small horns showing, being washed and combed and made to look beautiful. And it was the same everywhere in the streets of Madras, the cows and the oxen in the carts and the buffaloes all with their horns painted, sometimes just plain, one in one colour, the other in another, but often with gilt tips and plumes and flowers. Everything in Madras was an excuse for flowers, sweet ones. You made them up yourself, or you went round to the shops which threaded the flowers on to strings and clipped their edges, or else the flower man came round every evening to your house. Flowers were cheap in Madras, flowers and colour that Judy was going to miss so much when she went home.

*The North*

JUDY'S FATHER had been talking about going up to Delhi for a Conference, and perhaps staying with some friends there, and some others a bit farther north, towards the hills, before coming back to Madras and arranging to have all their things packed. But Judy hadn't paid much attention; she wanted to go back to Ponneri, but it was quite a long expedition. Ammani Patti kept saying she would like to go, but first one of her daughters came to stay, and then the cousin who had the car crashed it into a tree.

"Isn't there anything anyone can do about Lakshmi's father?" Judy asked. They were at the Gymkhana Club again, and some of Lakshmi's friends, the older girls, were sitting at a table at the far side with fizzy drinks and plates of chips. Most of them said it was too cold to swim in the winter, and besides—they were beginning to grow up, to be young ladies, to think about other things besides sports.

"I don't know, Judy," said her father, frowning. "I've talked to several people. But it seems to be a

matter of pulling strings, and I haven't found the right string to pull. Perhaps it can't be done in Madras."

Just then Haridas came running in, carrying his towel, and his mother after him, who came bustling up to their table, saying: "So you are going to Delhi. Oh, I am so glad! You will see the real India, clean and green and bracing, the fine strong men, the beautiful women, the shops. . . ." Judy's father asked her rather absent-mindedly if she wasn't able to do her shopping in Madras, and she went off again on how poor and dirty it all was, then turned to Judy. "And where is your friend Lakshmi? Is the water too cold for her too—run away and change, Haridas! Or are you not friends now?"

"She's not in Madras," said Judy angrily.

"Oh, of course—they sacked her father—yes?" She turned to Judy's father, but he hastily said that it was time to have a dip, and shoved Judy off before she could answer back.

A bit later her mother and Ben came down to the Club. "Here's the letter we were waiting for," her mother said. Her father looked at it, then said: "Judy, the Raos have asked you to stay too, and as you're going back so soon there's no point in stopping on at school. We'll go to Delhi together next week."

"Oh, Father!" said Judy. And then suddenly all the things she hadn't said to Haridas's mother came



boiling up. "But I don't want to go to Delhi—horrible Delhi!" she said.

Her father understood. "What, because of that stupid woman?" he said. "You surely aren't letting anything *she* says influence you, Judy?"

Put like that, of course she agreed. "It's the capital where the Parliament is. A different India, not a better one, Judy, and you ought to see it," her father went on.

"You'll need some warm clothes," said her mother; "but they'll be wanted for England in April."

Her mother had already knitted Judy a jersey and cardigan, though it seemed quite impossible that she would ever want them, and the tailor made her a thick skirt. "And you'll need woollen socks," her mother said, "and a raincoat. . . ."

"But this is *India*!" Judy protested; even in the hills she hadn't dreamt of wearing socks! However, everything was got ready.

"You'll be able to use your Hindi for talking to people up north," her mother said. But Judy only made a face.

Just before they left they went to the Mylapore floating festival in a suburb of Madras. For this they make ready a lovely, decorated raft for the God, and then in the evening pull it all round the tank in front of the Temple, lighted up with festoons of electric lights, all joined up to the main supply with a clever and complicated system of wires. They drove over and

with some difficulty found a place to park the car. All round the tank there was a kind of fair, with a huge shouting crowd, roundabouts and swings and masses of toys and trinkets and brass and bangles, all laid out on the pavement, and hundreds of beggars and people sitting packed on the stone steps of the tank, eating fruit and sweets and watching the raft coming slowly swirling on towards them. And six weeks from now, thought Judy, I shall be in England.

Indian railway trains are quite comfortable, but rather slow, and not always very clean, at any rate, for a long journey. But a lot of people travel by air, and so did Judy and her father, going by the night mail to Delhi, which isn't quite as expensive as the day plane, and has comfortable seats which you can tilt back and sleep in. Judy slept for a bit, and then the nice Air India hostess woke her because they were getting to Nagpur, where you have to change planes. "Nagpur—that means snake town," said her father, "and there's a cinema." So there was, with rather nice documentary films, and a kind of meal which was either breakfast or supper, according to how you felt.

It was still dark when they went on, and quite cool enough for Judy to be glad of her Air India blanket, and then the sun rose over flat country, sometimes ridged, the green and brown of cultivation far below, the clustering of villages. But it was



still early when they began to wheel down over splendid-looking buildings and wide streets, and so to New Delhi airport. "But it's cold!" said Judy, and, for the first time for ages, put on her woollen socks.

"There are the Raos!" said her father, and waved. And then, still rather sleepy, they were swept off into a car and away through avenues and gardens and weather which really was something like a real winter, or perhaps a very early spring. People were either wearing suits, or else wrapped in layers of blankets—and there was a man with a performing bear! Poor dusty bear, but at least he had a fur coat.

While her father was at his Conference, Judy was taken round sightseeing. The Raos had several children; the older ones all learnt English at school, and as soon as they stopped being shy, talked a lot to Judy, but always in English, never in Hindi. There was a boy called Dilip, like his father, and a girl called Indra, both of whom thought they were going to be doctors, though they hadn't started specialising yet, and a younger boy who was mostly interested in football. Their garden had a proper lawn and flower-beds, and all the English summer flowers beginning to come out, snapdragons and dwarf phlox, larkspur and candytuft and nasturtiums and cornflowers and pinks, and even the first of the sweet peas. Soon there would be masses of dahlias and petunias. The lovely hoopoes wandered about unconcernedly, digging for worms



with their long beaks, and there were lots of other birds. But the monkeys were a nuisance, coming in and



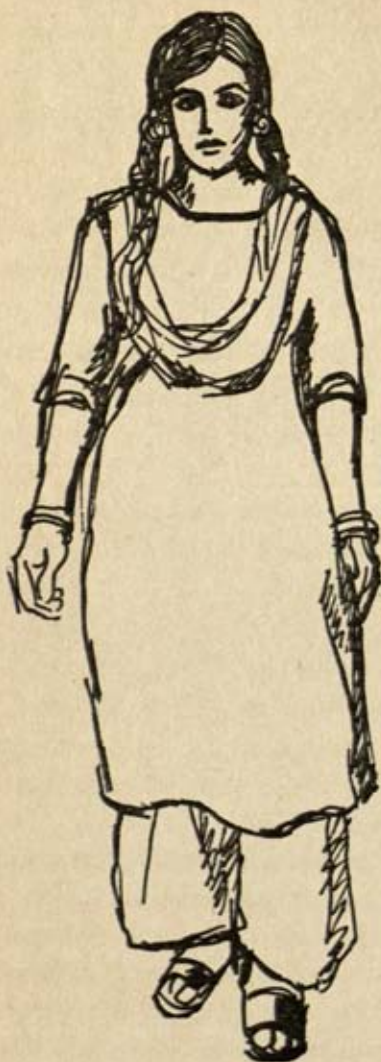
stealing things. The first night Judy slept like a log after her journey, but the second night she woke up to a horrible shrill howling, and was rather frightened.

But she was sharing a room with the bigger girl, Indra, who told her, sleepily, that it was only the jackals. The next day Dilip added that sometimes packs of wolves came, but Judy didn't think she really believed that.

In the middle of the day the sun was hot and bright, and everything looked shining. They went to old Delhi, past the high crenellated walls and the great gates which once shut in the city, and into the Red Fort where the white marble has been carved and arched and fretted into beautiful light rooms for emperors and princesses, and inlaid like a waving garden with coloured stones and jewels. In the museum here, there were pictures like Ammani Patti's, and a dish that would change colour if you put poison into it—or so the Rao boys said.

They went to the Qutab Minar, the enormous red, fluted tower carved with a flowering of Arabic letters. Here is the iron pillar "Standard of the Divine Vishnu" inscribed with words of ancient pride and power. "He by the breezes of whose prowess the southern ocean is still perfumed. . . ."

The stones of the buildings rose in splendid, undecorated shapes, no gods, no arms and legs. It was, somehow, restful. They climbed the Qutab Minar, the Rao boys running up it and showing off. Indra and Judy had run up the first twenty steps, but then got out of breath and started plodding. Indra wasn't wearing a sari, but the usual northern dress for school-



girls, kameez and shalwars, the practical, white, loose trousers which are washed every day, and a knee-length, tailored tunic. Indra's was blue-flowered cotton that day, and she had a winter woolly over it.

They came out on to the first of the balconies that ring the Qutab Minar, and Judy felt awfully giddy when she leaned on the parapet, which felt much too low, while the ground was so far off; the laid-out flowering gardens and the little people walking about or looking up with tiny brown blobs of faces. But Dilip shouted down from the top, and they had to go on. It was worse still on the higher balconies, from which you could see the domes and walls of the old



Mogul tombs or mosques, some ruined, some standing strongly, and beyond them the great city spread of Delhi.

Judy had to agree, though she didn't really want to, that New Delhi *was* clean. You could walk around everywhere, or go shopping—what lovely sweets!—and there wouldn't be any beggars or stray cows and buffaloes. You didn't see rickshaws being pedalled by poor, thin men, but instead there were three-wheeled open taxis with four seats, and of course proper taxis as well and lots of cars. Once, when she was out with Mrs. Rao, a Government car stopped at a big, low house across the road, and someone got out with a red rose in his brown coat. Mrs. Rao said: "There is the Prime Minister," and added, in a kind of whisper to herself: "God protect him!" And so this was Nehru, Judy thought, the man her father had told her so much about, looking sad and handsome and—oh—she somehow felt—terribly *kind*, the sort of man you'd ask the way from if you were lost. Someone in uniform saluted and the man with the red rose went into the house.

It was on the Sunday after this, when Judy and her father were being driven round by Dr. Rao, looking at things, that her father said: "I think, Judy, that it's just possible that something may be going to happen about Kumar, Lakshmi's father. They seem to know something about it here." He couldn't be sure, he went on, but it seemed as though,

at the centre, certain people didn't have the same influence. . . .

Judy didn't quite understand, but it did sound as if things were going to be all right. "So I'll see Lakshmi again before I go back!" she said.

"Of course, old girl," said her father, and then to Dr. Rao: "You know, Dilip, all those old colleges and memorials and cloisters, the soft way the stone is worn down under the trees—all the serenity and quiet of it, and all these pigeons fluttering about—well, it reminds me all the time of Oxford!"

And Dr. Rao, who had also been at Oxford, said yes, didn't it, and these gardens were almost as much used by students coming in with their books to work.

Then the Conference came to an end, and they went up to stay for two nights with her father's other friend, who was a Forest Officer. They travelled in a bumpy but rather jolly bus, full of friendly people, and almost everyone, including Judy, ate roasted peanuts and oranges. There were camels on the road here, almost as many camels as buffaloes, and a few very nice-looking riding horses. Many of the camels were pulling carts of sugar cane to the factories. Everywhere there were green fields, young wheat just coming into ear, acres of dal or peanuts growing thickly. The villages had strongly built mud-brick houses; it was too cold here for palm-lattice. There were more trees about, and sometimes cut and stacked timber in the villages.





Then, at a bus stop, there was her father's friend, the Forest Officer, thin and dark and seeming so pleased to see them; he was from the South too, and liked getting the Madras gossip. They drove up into the edge of the hills and through a forest of broad-leaved,



handsome trees. "Sal," said the Forest Officer, "and all natural forest—but wait till you see my teak!"

His bungalow was in the middle of a big garden planted with trees and bushes. Most of them were not yet in bloom, but there was one silk-cotton tree with great red fleshy flowers that fell with a plop. Later on Judy noticed that there were always birds pecking at them, but now she wanted to explore first of all, even though there was a lovely wood fire on a brick hearth in the main room that smelt wonderful. She ran all the way round the bungalow, and suddenly realised that, at the back, there were two elephants gently flapping their ears and reaching out their trunks for bundles of grass from the great heap in front of them. She went closer; each of them had two legs tied, but quite lightly, just to remind them not to walk about. They stood there so happily under the great spreading neem tree, and they had their faces painted, not quite so elaborately as Temple elephants, but with a lot of black round their eyes like some kinds of Hindu ladies have. There were red stars like elephant caste-marks on their foreheads, and neat black caps painted across their heads. Judy took a deep breath, made a great effort and thought of all those Hindi lessons.

The man who looked after the elephants seemed delighted and produced several salaams and a sentence so long and complicated that Judy could only make out a few words of it. However, between her Hindi and his English they got on very well, and in no time

he was saddling the bigger of the elephants with a kind of mattress which had four little poles at the corners and a step to put your feet on. He made the ropes fast, the elephant knelt down, and Judy climbed on to it, just as she had done with that other elephant on the Game Reserve, by one hind leg and its looped tail. On the way up she patted it, but thought that perhaps that doesn't mean much to an elephant. Then it got up, rocking like a boat in the way she remembered, and she held on to the pole and felt gloriously near the trees and the birds.

They came round in front of the veranda where her father and the Forest Officer were drinking some of those cups of strong tea which people seem to drink every hour or two in North India. Her father laughed a lot, and then the Forest Officer came and told her that she was riding on an old, old lady elephant, nearly a century old, and in her time she had been a great shikar elephant—look, there on her neck were the marks of the tiger's claws! The elephant waved her trunk at him. "She thinks I must always do what she wants," he said affectionately, and sent someone for a coconut which the elephant put whole into her mouth and crunched up. After the ride was over he gave Judy a great lump of rough sugar in a leaf, which was another thing which this elephant liked very much.

The elephant's real work was hauling trees out of the forest, but she quite liked walking round with Judy on her back, getting special treats. Judy got the

feeling that this elephant was just as happy as the wild forest elephants, and she was also quite sure that, by the end of the time, the elephant recognised her. And besides that, she learnt a lot of new and much more interesting Hindi words, all about elephants.



*Not Goodbye*

AT PONNERI it didn't seem as though things would ever change. Sometimes Lakshmi hoped that, in spite of promising not to, Judy might have spoken to Ammani Patti about how things really were. She went on with her classes, but there was talk of Valli, the stone-mason's daughter, being married; if so her husband would not let her stay on. If only she had some good reading books for them! She had asked both the social workers, but the books they gave her were difficult, not really written for a class like hers. She knew so well by now the kind of thing which would have interested them! Once they had an educational film, and everyone came and sat down on the ground in front of it and murmured with delight and interest. That was the way to get at the older women, perhaps.

Gradually the colour wore off the horns of the Pongal cows and oxen; people forgot they'd been full fed then. The later rice was harvested and winnowed; the straw was made into stacks for feed in the lean months of summer. Some irrigation water was coming

from the new canal, but not as much as was hoped. As ever, the men worked in the fields from dawn to dusk ; as ever, the women collected cow dung into baskets and plastered it on to their walls to dry in round cakes, each marked with the print of a right hand, to use later on as fuel to heat their cooking pots. Yes, there was a little more money made out of the cottage industries ; if famine came it would take longer to kill people ; some women had more silver bangles ; some households had a little more cloth, an extra pot or lamp. Was it possible to think that, by the end of the second Five-Year Plan they would be, not rich, but at least less poor ?

And then Sarasvati got ill ; her mother tried the remains of the various drugs they had brought with them, but it wasn't an ordinary fever. It must have come, she said, from wading about with the other girls in that horrible canal, washing clothes and pots. Sarasvati had not been brought up to do such things. Worriedly, Lakshmi agreed that this might be it. They took her over to the Dispensary where they looked at her and gave her mother some pills ; she insisted on paying for them—they would surely be better than free ones ! But Sarasvati got worse instead of better. At last Lakshmi said to her father : " We cannot go on being proud. If you do you will kill my sister. You must write to Ammani Patti or else I will. Sarasvati must go back to Madras and be taken to the hospital where Judy's father works."

Kumar looked at his daughter and knew she was

speaking for his wife and knew that, as things had worked out, she was right and he was beaten.

"If I do that," he said, "if I tell Ammani Patti how things are, she will say at once that you must go to her; I know that. Your mother and all of you."

"And you, Father?"

He looked away. "I must stay here. It is the only work I have. I will send back what money I can. Your mother has always hated it here. She—she begins to look old. She never sings now."

"You will be lonely," Lakshmi said. "Who will cook for you?"

"I will manage," he said, "and perhaps it is better to be alone when one has hurt the ones one loves best."

"Father," said Lakshmi, "you have done nothing wrong. And if you stay, I will stay with you."

"You cannot stay without your mother—or some other woman at least. . . ."

But Lakshmi saw quite well that he had hesitated, that his eyes had lit up. She adjusted her sari into neat, grown-up folds. "Certainly I can stay, Father. I am a modern woman, an intellectual. That was what you wanted me to be: a modern Indian woman. Besides, I cannot go as easily as the rest. I, too, have my work here."

"You are brave," said Kumar, "my brave daughter. But think—if you go back to Madras you will be able to go to classes again, to go on with your dancing, to see all your friends—Judy——"

"All that I have thought of," Lakshmi said, and



looked her father deep in the eyes. Then she brought pen and paper and put them in front of him.

He wrote slowly, scratching out and then writing again, for a long time. At the end he gave the letter to Lakshmi. "Have I swallowed enough of my pride?" he said.

She read it through. "Yes," she said, and then glanced back at the room where Sarasvati was lying. "But—Father—I think you must ask for a telegram back. Then we can hire a cart and take them all in to the junction. Mother is not very clever at travelling, but—we will send them Second Class in a Ladies Only compartment, and you shall tell the Guard and—it will be all right. I also, I will swallow my pride and write to Judy, and ask that her father should see Sarasvati at once."

That was the letter which Judy found when she got back from Delhi. She read it while she was having a big breakfast after the night flight back. There was papaya and lime, and scrambled eggs and guavas—but not as big and nice as the Delhi guavas, she said—and she was explaining to her mother that it really had been cold, and about the elephant and how funny camel's faces are. And for a bit she hadn't taken in quite how serious the letter from Lakshmi was, for Lakshmi had begun quite cheerfully and only put in the important part about Sarasvati later. She gave it to her father, who stopped drinking his coffee, and frowned and began muttering about Indian sanitation.

And then suddenly, who had come in but Ammani

Patti, who made a namaskar to Judy's father and mother. Judy's mother offered her a cup of coffee, and she began rather nervously talking about the weather, but Judy said: "I've just had a letter—have they come?"

"Yes," said Ammani Patti, "poor things. And my granddaughter, my little Sarasvati, she is perhaps not so well——"

"I'll be over at once," said Judy's father. Then there was quite a bit of bustle, and Sarasvati was taken into hospital, where, in a few days, they got at what was wrong. Judy went to see her, and brought her the kind of plain sweets she was allowed to have, and some picture books. She looked very thin and hunched up, but the nurses were pleased with her, and said everything would be all right. "But there is Lakshmi all alone with her father!" Ammani Patti said. "It is not right. . . ."

Lakshmi had cried a little the evening of the day when the others had all left. It was partly that her mother had cried such a lot at the station, and the last they had seen of her was her face covered with tears at the open window of the train. Kumar and Lakshmi had both tried to be cheerful, but afterwards, in the cart going back, it wasn't so easy. Besides, it was true, what her father had thought: she had in a way so much wanted to go back to Madras and the old life and her friends. Ammani Patti, she knew, would have found the fees for her dance lessons. Yet would she have been right to take them? Six months ago, she



said to herself, I would not have been able to think like that about money. But now I am already old enough. Many things have become plain to me.

But after that she found she had plenty else to think about. She did all the cooking, trying to make dishes her mother had not let her try before. They were not all as nice as she had meant them to be, but her father said everything was good. And in the evenings, now, he talked not only about his work and her classes, but sometimes about things he had learnt when he was in Europe, and sometimes about history or politics. In a week or two he taught Lakshmi more algebra and geometry than any of her friends were likely to have learnt at school. Once or twice one of the social welfare people came in for a cup of tea, and Lakshmi asked them about the training for village work, and what exams one would have to pass.

Sometimes she had trouble with her literacy class. There was a woman who came there only to make trouble, yet Lakshmi did not like to tell the social workers. Then little Mohini's mother from the next village, and her aunt, both of whom were determined and cheerful women, came in one day and talked to this other woman, and after that she did not come back, and the rest of the class were very good and attentive for several days. Mohini often brought her flowers for her hair, and once some sweets.

And then, one hot afternoon a car came to Ponneri with two men in elegant white suits, one carrying a brief-case ; they found Kumar down at the canal with



a measuring pole, speaking angrily to one of the foremen, and with canal mud smeared over his own arms and legs. They introduced themselves and shook hands, and went back with him to the office. One of them said something to the head engineer, who became very much embarrassed and sent out for tea and biscuits and files and plans, and began talking very fast.

Then they went back to Kumar's house, where the two men made polite namaskars to Lakshmi. Kumar said : " They want me to go back with them to Madras—at once—but where will you go? I cannot leave you alone."

Lakshmi had her hand up at her throat ; it seemed almost as if her heart was choking her. " Father," she said, " is it—is it—have you fought the tigers? "

" I or my friends," her father said. " I think there are arrows in their hearts, but you—I may be a day or two——"

Lakshmi bit her lip. She didn't want to stay alone in the house, especially at night—and most of all if her father had made enemies, who might want to revenge themselves if they saw a chance. But then she thought, no, I have all my friends ! " I will go to Valli's house, or Mohini's—oh, I have many places to go ! "

" The rest-house," suggested one of the men with the brief-case, but Lakshmi tossed her head. No, she was part of the village. While her father washed and changed and got his papers together, she went over and found her class, half of whom asked her to stay with them. In the end she decided to go with Mohini

to the next village. She would feel very safe with Mohini's mother and aunt. She, too, packed a small case, taking anything of value in that or wearing it round her neck and on her arms. They sealed their own house with a chain and padlock across the door. The car dropped her at Mohini's father's two-roomed house, and then drove off with her father waving to her.

A day passed and another day, then in the evening a man came with a telegram which just said *Tigers running*. She was terribly excited. It was odd how much Mohini's father and mother seemed to know about what had happened to her father. They knew the names of people in Madras who had been her father's enemies—names she had barely heard herself. The head engineer came round and tried to present her with a length of silk brocade and a box of chocolates, but she looked down modestly and murmured that she could not accept anything while her father was away. After he had left the village people said she was quite right, and they themselves brought her garlands.

But Mohini was a little sad. They shared a bed at night, and in the hot, still hours, Mohini said: "You will go back to the city and I will never see you again."

"That will not be," said Lakshmi. "I will not leave you for always." And she promised Mohini, in the names of her father and mother, that she would surely come back.

It was the fourth day when another car came—the cousin's—but it was Kumar who was driving it. At



the back were Ammani Patti and Judy, holding on to the window frame, her mouth open with excitement. Lakshmi ran out to meet them. "The tigers have run," said Kumar, "but one or two have been bowled over, and there is another limping!" It was odd, because he was still thin and his hair untidy and he hadn't even had time to get a new shirt, but somehow he was glowing inside, and looked like a boy out of school.

"And now?" asked Lakshmi.

"Now—we pack and go! And afterwards I shall see to it that the canal is dug properly and the villages get their tube wells."

"I've come to help!" said Judy.

"For one hour, Judy," said Lakshmi, "you will be my father's daughter in my place and help with the packing, for I must gather my class once more and tell them I am going. But also I shall tell them I am coming back."

"But, my Lakshmi," said Ammani Patti, "you are coming home now, home to Madras, to your own life. If I had known I would never have let you stay! My bad son—he was too proud to tell his mother! So now it is all over. You need never come back."

Lakshmi did not interrupt, but in the end she said, very quietly: "But, Ammani Patti, it is not like that at all. I know now that we are needed in the villages—as Gandhiji said. It is good that I am one of those who are chosen for this. Perhaps I will finish school, perhaps, even, I shall go to College. But I shall certainly come back. I have promised."



Ammani Patti looked from her to her father. "What do you say, Kumar?"

He said: "Ignorance is one of the worst tigers of India. I think Lakshmi, too, desires to kill tigers, and I cannot be the one to say no."

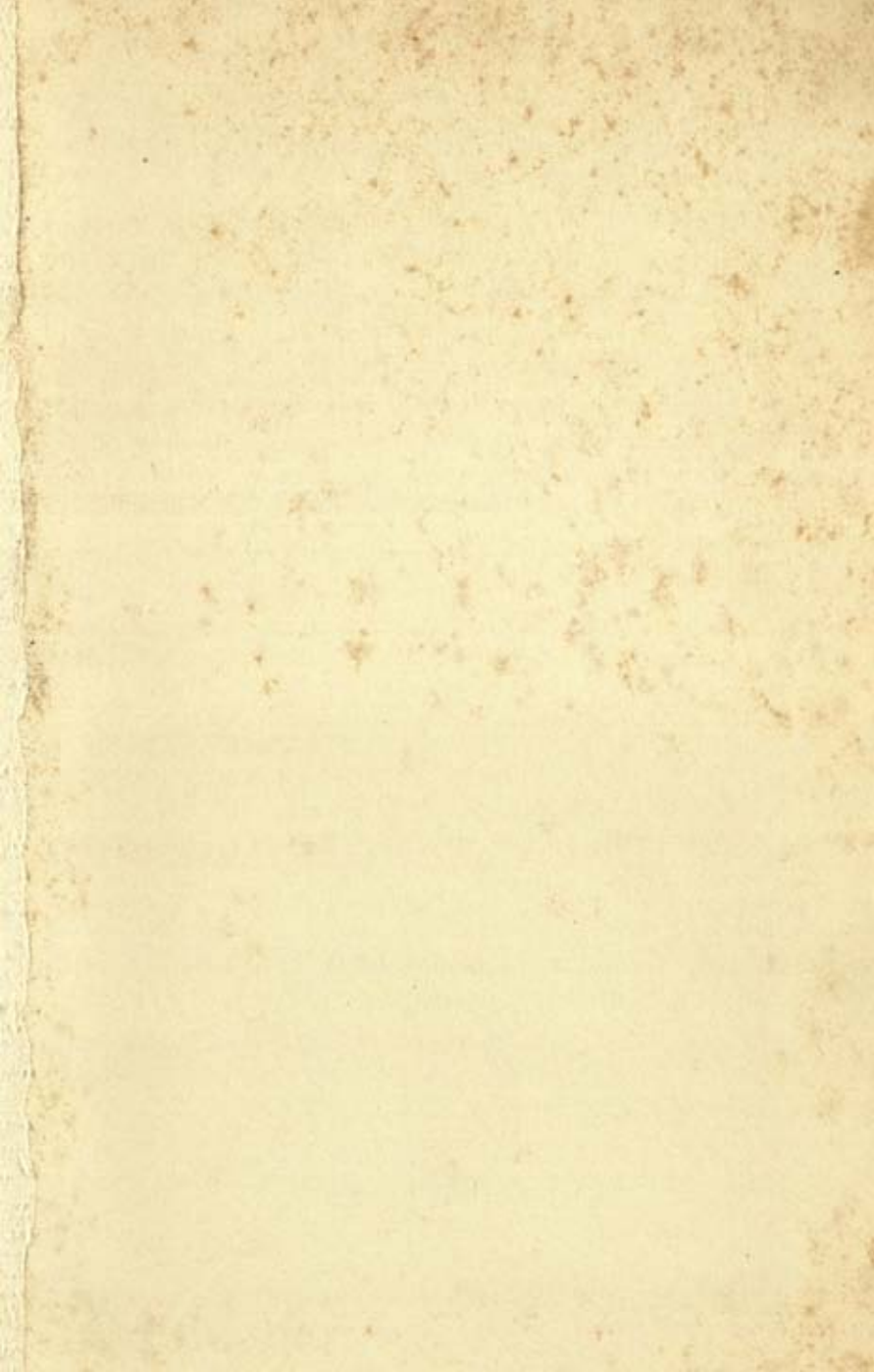
"If you really promised to go back, Lakshmi," said Judy, "of course you will have to. But do you think, if I promise to come back to India some day, when I'm grown up too, will I be needed? Because otherwise—oh, Lakshmi, I couldn't bear to go home and never see you any more!"

"Of course you will be needed," said Kumar. "And now, come and be my daughter. Let us open that padlock and pack what has to be packed and give the rest to our friends."

Ammani Patti took Judy's hand, and they made their way up to the locked house together. Lakshmi waved to them and went off down the road to the Social Centre. And then, one after another, the women and girls of the village came after her to say goodbye—but only for a time.

THE END





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